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YREKA JIM'S JOKER

OR
THE RIVALS OF
RED NOSE
BY
EDW. L. WHEELER

CHAPTER I.

A BIG MISTAKE.

A BEAUTIFUL autumn day was drawing to a close, over a magnificent Idaho landscape, which, though mountainous and rugged in the extreme, was pleasing to the eye, and such as an artist would go into ecstasies over.

Gigantic mountains soared heavenward, met, on their tapering descent, by heavily timbered foothills; here wide canyons pierced the mighty range; deep and fathomless abysses prevailed; crystal cascades leaping from ledge to ledge, sparkled like sheets of diamonds, only to swell into fiercer torrents as they surged on toward a running level.

Already the early caresses of autumn's biting breath had colored the leaves of the forest, and all other foliage, and the dying sunlight of the warm, though breezy September day, which opens our narrative, dwelt upon a most beautiful panorama of variegated coloring, produced by nature at only one season of the year.

Standing out in bold relief, and visible to the naked eye at a great distance, owing to the rarefied atmosphere, a horseman was visible,

AN INSTANT LITTLE JOKER AND THE CHAMPION WERE LOCKED IN AN EMBRACE, WHICH YREKA WELL KNEW MEANT "BUSINESS" FOR THE INSOLENT ST. MAUR.

high up the mountain side, and out upon a plateau-like ledge, which overlooked a magnificent canyon valley, at his feet—a beautiful placque of nature, a mile or two wide and many miles long, threaded by a tortuous, silvery stream, and carpeted in emerald, a veritable grazer's paradise, such as are rare enough in that Silverland.

That the rich, inexhaustible pasturage was used was evidenced by the herd of several hundred head of cattle, which was feeding there, not far from where an odd-shaped little habitation stood beside the serpentine stream—a structure built jointly of logs, stone and mud, and resembling a Mexican hacienda, from the fact that it was built low, and a roofed veranda ran entirely around it.

The horseman before mentioned, who had halted his spirited animal within a dangerously close proximity to the edge of the ledge, surveyed the scene before him, long and admiringly, his eye kindling with enthusiasm the longer he gazed.

A whitish column of smoke curled up from the chimney of the dwelling, and by bringing a field-glass to his eyes, he could distinguish a person walking upon the veranda.

A handsome fellow, this horseman, graceful of form and yet evidently a very athlete; possessed of a clear-cut, manly face, in which reposed intelligence, combined with evident decision of character and quick judgment.

His eyes were dark, brilliant and magnetic in their glances; his mouth, shaded by a handsome mustache, denoted firmness in resolve yet expressing a happy good nature; his hair, dark-brown in color, rippled back in little waves over his broad shoulders—a magnificent head of hair, that any man or woman might have been proud of.

Top-boots, a common suit of clothing, and a white sombrero, were the features of his attire, while a belt, containing a pair of pearl-handled six-shooters were his only bodily ornaments.

A rifle was also slung to his back; while his saddle equipments and horse betokened that he spared neither money nor pains to get the best.

The sun lacked an hour of sinking over the range, back of him, and for a considerable space of time he seemed loth to leave the ledge, and the cheerful panorama spread out before him.

The distant bark of a wolf, however, caused him to glance at his watch, and he picked up the bridle-reins with a last lingering glance into the valley.

"Come, Chub, we mustn't tarry here any longer," he said, wheeling the animal and sending him cantering along a rugged mountain path. "We will not reach our destination, on time, if we do not hurry; and to miss to-night means to miss much. So get along now, light-footed, and let's see how we will strike camp!"

The animal plainly was accustomed to mountain travel, as it was but a few hours in reaching a mountain mining-town, although miles from the ledge overlooking Vista Valley.

Deep down in a rugged, forest-locked ravine, was this town—an ominous, forbidding place, where the sun shone but few hours each day, and where eight months of winter usually prevailed.

Rich in precious minerals, however, was the camp's immediate surroundings, and hence the fact that the denizens were willing to endure the winters, that they might enrich themselves, during the brief summer period, when "ten-fut" snow did not interfere with their labors, with pick, pan, powder and drill.

Red Nose, was the name of the camp; Red Nose, with a couple of hundred and fifty inhabitants; Red Nose, not counted on, particularly as a "boom" town; yet willing to allow that her citizens were as "fly" as those of any other town along the range.

It was down into this town the handsome horseman galloped, and drew rein before the only hostelry known as the *Buckin' Cayuse*—a cayuse, carved out of wood, and represented in a "bucking" attitude being suspended above the door, and giving the place its appellation.

Red Nose, like many another mining-camp, was pretty much controlled by one individual, who held the leading mining interests and the monetary circulation, in his own grasp.

This man was Judge Jeremiah Alvin, who proudly traced his ancestry back to a certain nobleman, who came over in the Mayflower. He had been among the first to invade the gulch where Red Nose placidly nestled; and thereby hangs a brief tale, relatively to how the town got its name.

Seven men were the "planters" of the camp, but the judge having very nearly all the cash, was of course the leading spirit of the party.

He "took up" by Government process, all of the adjacent territory that was worth working, and then came the question—what should the new "city" be named?

A debate was had in regard to what would be the most appropriate name, and by a singular coincidence, it became noticeable that each of those seven pilgrims was possessed of a cherry red nose, the fruits of exposure to the sun.

Of course there was no other earthly cause that those seven "smellers" should be painted cardinal red, except for the caresses of Old Sol, for the "judge" was a strict temperance advocate, and constantly watched over his little band, exhorting them to steer clear of the flowing bowl, or quit his society forever.

So, at one of the prospectors' suggestion, the camp was named Red Nose; and then, on condition that his six pards should forever abstain from intoxicating beverage, and fight against the introduction of such stuff into the town, the judge made them his equal partners in all that pertained to the future success and financial prosperity of their pet "locate."

Thus it was that the camp bloomed out into the only place on the range where liquor was a dead letter, and could not be had for love or money.

Every new citizen of the camp was first forced to promise not to sell, permit to be sold, or encourage the sale of any stimulants, before he could purchase a site to begin business on, or obtain any employment, whatever.

The judge was boss of Red Nose, and things had to go his way, or some one would "drop," for such citizen as showed any inclination to break the judge's commandments was at once hauled up before a stern Committee, and not only heavily fined, but ordered to make himself scarce, under penalty of getting "salivated."

So, there were no liquor saloons in Red Nose, consequently few "jamborees," such as form the lively side of life in many mining-towns. There were gaming-rooms, dance-houses, a "theater," and other places of the class, but not a bar, where "hard stuff" was dealt out.

Not that the breath of every pilgrim of Red Nose was a stranger to the odor of "bug-juice," that was out of the question.

Frequently the Committee had to deal with some party, whose legs or unsteady antics proclaimed that he had interviewed a bottle or demijohn, and there were those who hinted, out of Judge Alvin's hearing, that the "initiated" need not go without their "booze" even in Red Nose town.

Two of the original seven abstainers had had to "get up and get" through crooking the elbow, on the sly, and their interests in the mines, through original agreement, were transferred to Alvin.

And those who believed they ought to know, claimed that there were three if not four more of the "originals" who were not above suspicion, and whose cases were liable to come up, for an early investigation.

Then there was an undercurrent of popular feeling that Judge Alvin's days as "mayor" of Red Nose were numbered—that as soon as the people could find some fearless, independent individual who would have the courage to become a candidate, they would elect him the ruler of Red Nose on the free-license ticket, in spite of Judge Jeremiah Alvin and his money-bags.

As the judge was becoming richer and richer every day, there were wise heads among those rough and rugged miners who reasoned that the judge would not feel deeply aggrieved if the remainder of the original partners would be caught at crooking their elbows, and thereby forfeit, to his advantage, their interest in the mines, thus making him sole owner of all the mineral-producing territory, and, in fact, of all the town, with the exception of a few purchased habitations and business places which he stood ready to buy back whenever their owners should want to sell.

Up to the evening of the stranger's arrival in Red Nose, the people's secret desire for a new administration had been daily growing stronger, and the prospect was that there would be an open revolt against no license ere long, when Mr. Alvin would have to submit to the desires and will of the people, in spite of his riches.

With which brief sketch of the situation, we will return to the new arrival in Red Nose.

The single rough street of the camp was alive with citizens, as the new-comer drew rein before the Buckin' Cayuse, and evidences were plain that something unusual was occurring, or was to occur, shortly.

A bonfire had been kindled opposite the Cayuse, and another further down the street; knots of people were collected, here and there;

others were hurrying to and fro, and a general state of excitement seemed to prevail.

The veranda, which fronted the hotel, a two-story structure, built principally of logs, was crowded with people—men, whose attire seemed somewhat of a holiday character, and gave rise to the impression that they were more prominent citizens than the main rabble who had to take to the street.

A lightning glance of the stranger took in the faces on the veranda; then, he carelessly threw the reins upon the neck of his horse, and dismounted, as fine a specimen of well-developed manhood, as ever had put in an appearance in that wild region.

There was an audible and perhaps an eager murmur of the crowd on the veranda, and a broad-shouldered, heavily-fleshed man stepped forward.

"Good-evening, Mr. St. Maur! I assure you it is one of the greatest pleasures of my life to meet you, coming to us as you do, under such all-important auspices. Allow me—I am Judge Alvin, and it does me proud to present to you the people who advocate temperance. Boys, this is the Honorable Charles St. Maur—Chippeway Charley—the great temperance apostle, who has come to address us, to-night. Three cheers, for St. Maur!"

The cheers were given, with a "tiger," by the men on the veranda, who appeared to be representatives of the temperance element of Red Nose; while the judge busied himself in vigorously seizing and shaking the stranger's hand.

While the stranger looked as if he regarded the proceeding as somewhat questionable.

"You will excuse me!" he began—"but—"

"No, we'll not excuse you!" the judge declared, dragging him up on the veranda. "It is but once in a lifetime that we people, 'way back here, in the mountains, have an opportunity of listening to an orator of your rare intelligence and eloquence, and, tired and travel-stained though you are, we must insist that you benefit us benighted mortals with a speech, to-night. But, understanding that you would be hungry, we have granted you an hour, in which to rest and refresh. Up with him, boys, and bear him to the banquet, and shame be to any one of you who does not look to it that he feeds for sixty minutes, without a chance to speak. Fodder first, then the vital question!"

There was certainly strong evidence that the judge's will was law, for the stranger was seized by many hands, lifted to an altitude above the heads of the crowd, and, 'mid ringing cheers, borne into the hotel.

The ground story of the establishment was all in one large apartment, but a certain portion of it was set apart for a dining-room, and here a table was groaning under its weight of frontier delicacies, prepared especially for St. Maur's entertainment.

Tenderly the stranger was seated at the table, and busy hands engaged in filling his plate with such luxuries as mortal man seldom gets up in those rugged mountain towns.

At first the stranger felt unmistakably bewildered and at loss what to do, although he made several attempts to make himself heard.

But it was no use!

Plainly, he had been brought there to eat, and so, finally, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, he "squared himself," and began to stow away the provender with remarkable rapidity.

It did the crowd good!

Some of the more sedate watched him with manifest approbation, while others sung and danced about in great glee.

Enough for three hearty men did the stranger put away; then, when he appeared fully satisfied, he leaned back in his chair, observing:

"Gentlemen, I hardly know how to express my grateful appreciation, of this unexpected and elegant reception, inasmuch as I don't happen to be the individual you evidently have taken me for. My name is not St. Maur, but on the contrary, I am best known as Yreka Jim, and I've dropped over here to-night to stir up a little game of poker. However, as there's nothing mean about me, suppose we all take a smile on the strength of the mistake?"

And reaching into an inner pocket of his coat, he drew forth a quart flask of whisky and extended it to Judge Alvin, with a pleasant smile, as much as to say—"It's prime stuff; try it!"

CHAPTER II.

YREKA JIM'S THREAT.

THE audacity of the stranger in having allowed the deception to take place, was only equaled by his supreme "cheek" in offering to treat the

crowd to "bug-juice," whose alleged motive was to prevent the introduction of the stuff into the moral and good little city.

For a moment the temperance element glared at him with surprise and rage commingled.

Evidently it was hard for them to credit their own sight and hearing.

"Sir-rh!" Judge Alvin gasped, drawing his portly form to a dignified attitude—"sir-rh! I am astounded—shocked—horried beyond expression! What do you mean, sir, by insulting this delegation of representative citizens?"

"Representative, are they?" Yreka retorted, placing the bottle on the table and gazing calmly from face to face. "An' I insulted 'em, did I?"

"To be sure you insulted them, sir—insulted them as they were never insulted before!" the judge declared in hot anger.

"Then durn me ef you ain't the easiest insulted party o' galoots I've met in a year! Don't never crook yer wrist, hey?"

"Thank Providence, no!" the judge cried.

"Before you, behold a noble band of honorable men who have sworn to forever abstain from using intoxicants, and also to prohibit their existence in this town. You, sir, in bold defiance of our laws, have dared to insult us, as a people, by bringing the curse of creation among us. What have you to say for yourself?—what have you to expect of us, an outraged populace? Zounds, sir! my very blood boils in my veins!"

"If your whole system is as fiery as the end of your nose, I wonder you are not all boiled up!" Yreka retorted. "As for myself, I beg to remark that this is the first occasion this old pard"—patting the bottle—"has ever been insulted by being refused suffrage by so august a body of citizens; and as for what you're going to do about it, why I am ready to debate on that matter at any time it may become your pleasure. In the mean time I'll take a nip, for, although not a regular drinker, I feel that a bit of stimulant might do me good after my fatiguing journey. So here's lookin' at you!"

And smiling blandly, he removed the cork and placed the bottle to his lips.

For an instant the liquor flowed from the bottle into his mouth, to the rage of Judge Alvin, then—

There was the report of a pistol-shot, and the bottle was smashed into a thousand pieces, which, together with the liquor, flew in every direction.

A cry of surprise and indignation broke from Yreka Jim's lips, and he sprang to his feet, and laid hold of his two revolvers.

Quick as he was, however, a dozen weapons were covering him, ere he could draw his own.

"Oh! you'd better not try the belligerent game around here, sir!" Judge Alvin warned, "for it won't work. We do not tolerate any of your class of characters around here. You have broken the rules of the camp and you must abide by the penalty for the offense!"

"I must?" Yreka echoed, coolly. "Who said so?"

"I say so! The constitution and by-laws of the town say so! I am the mayor, sir, and own pretty near all of the place. What I do not own is owned by temperance people, and we will positively allow no whisky in Red Nose, nor any one who has an appetite for it. You must surrender and stand trial. You will be fined, and ejected from the town, and to return here again, means your death! So, if you were not previously aware of the condition of things in Red Nose, you are enlightened, now, and for all time!"

The judge uttered this declaration with the pompous air of a king, and waved his hand toward his total abstinence flock.

Yreka Jim eyed him with an expression of disgust.

"I was not aware of the fact that this was a temperance town," he said, "but, had I been, it could not have made any difference; I should have come just the same, and wherever I go I always carry a flask of liquor for personal use, or in case of accident necessitating its use. As for submitting to arrest, for such a fancied grievance, I've no idea of doing anything of the sort."

"You surrender, or you die with your boots on!" Judge Alvin declared. "We have you covered, and shall not hesitate in the least to shoot you, providing you do not surrender. Majority is might, and might is right in this camp, and the government shall be maintained, and its ordinances upheld, even though it costs a hundred men's lives. You have five minutes in which to decide which you would rather do—surrender or die!"

A clock, behind the bar, indicated the time—five minutes to eight.

Yreka Jim glanced first at the clock, and then at the crowd.

The latter had swelled greatly in numerical count, and included nearly all of the people of the camp, good, bad and indifferent.

The faces of the prohibition element expressed their bitterness of feeling for Yreka Jim, and evidently they were quite ready to pounce upon him at a word from Jerry Alvin.

There were other faces, however, of the sturdy, strong-limbed mountain miners, who exchanged low remarks to one another as they critically surveyed the sport.

With his keen glance Yreka swept the sea of faces, and knew that it would avail him little to attempt, by any bold or daring move, to escape.

Full two-score of revolvers were leveled at him, and there was no reason to believe that the men who held them would fail to shoot, at Alvin's direction.

Three minutes of the allotted time passed ere the menaced man spoke in answer to the last remarks of the judge.

"You are self-appointed mayor of this town, you say!" he finally observed. "You apprise me that I will be fined and forbidden the town?"

"Exactly. We have no use here for men of your stamp!"

"Very good. I will surrender and pay the fine and leave the camp. How much will the fine be?"

"That will be decided at a meeting of the Council. We will hold you in durance until we deliberate and render a decision. Throw down your arms!"

"That is unnecessary. My word, that I surrender, is all-sufficient. There is one question I wish to ask: Who shot the bottle from my hand?"

"I did, sir, and you should be glad you escaped that easily!" a ringing voice cried, and a man rushed forward, through the crowd. "I am Charles St. Maur, the man whom you were mistaken for, and a foe to intoxicants and all who use them!"

As he confronted the sport, a murmur of surprise escaped the spectators.

The two men were singularly alike!

They were evidently of about one weight, and pretty evenly matched, as regarded muscle and sinew. In face, there was a slight resemblance, both having mustaches alike, eyes alike, mouths alike, and each wearing hair long, down over the shoulders.

Their attire, too, was of a singular character, and, seen together, they might readily have been taken for brothers.

But there was little of the brotherly, in their expressions, as they surveyed each other. Coldly critical, and cynical was each man's glance, and no words further than had been uttered, were required to tell that from that time they were mortal foes.

The arrival of St. Maur upon the scene, elicited a cry of surprise and approval, from the prohibitive element; but neither he nor Yreka Jim paid the slightest attention to this fact. Each seemed intent on "sizing up" the other.

"So you are the man who fired the shot, eh?" Yreka finally said, nothing in his tone to indicate that he was in the least excited.

"I am the man!" St. Maur declared, with emphasis.

"And you, I suppose, come here, to work upon these people as a representative of total abstinence principles?"

"I do, sir, most assuredly!"

"And will you be kind enough to illustrate how you ever became called to these people's attention as a temperance lecturer?"

"I believe that is unnecessary. My reputation as a lecturer on the evils of intemperance is wide-spread, in the Northwestern States and territories!"

Yreka Jim smiled, significantly.

"So I am aware," he said, with sarcasm. "If I remember correctly, you were involved in a drunken brawl in Leadville, a few months ago, and had to slope for shooting your paramour!"

"You lie! You are an infernal liar!" the advocate cried.

"You are at liberty to utter all of that sort of thing you wish!" Yreka replied, "as I am at present unprepared to choke the words back down your throat. However, please understand this much: henceforth, you and I are enemies, and it will be conducive to your personal safety to keep widely out of my path."

As for Judge Alvin and his temperance racket, I don't care a cent for that, and though I be forced to leave the town, I shall return again, and, what is more, I, Yreka Jim, of Vista Valley, swear that I will rule the town, in Alvin's stead!"

It was a bold declaration, uttered with a ringing earnestness that no one could doubt, and naturally it created a sensation.

"You rule this town!" the judge cried, furiously—"you?"

"Ay, I!" Yreka retorted. "I came not here to meddle with your local governing affairs, sir, but on the contrary to raise a little sum of money at poker, necessary to clear up a mortgage due on my cattle-range, over in Vista Valley. However, since I see that the people of this camp are the subjects of a petty tyrant I believe the majority of the people will rejoice at an opportunity to choose a leader of their own liking, so if they assent, I'll run for the office of Mayor of Red Nose, in the face of all opposition. Now, sir, I am ready to surrender!"

With an expression of disdain upon his handsome face, Yreka Jim folded his arms across his breast.

For an instant Judge Alvin was speechless with rage, for he was a man of wonderfully keen perceptions and at once saw that in Yreka Jim he had incurred not only an enemy, but a rival for popularity—a man who, by his skill, daring and intrepid actions, was liable to do just what he had threatened—wrench the rule of Red Nose town from his (Alvin's) grasp.

For it was no secret that the judge was daily losing more friends than he was winning, and he was not altogether blind to the fact, himself.

The threat of Yreka Jim and his defiant demeanor greatly added to Alvin's anger and also certainly alarmed him, but he showed no fear and at once resolved to crush the man at once.

"We shall see!" he cried, savagely—"we shall see, sir. Seize him, boys, and bind him!"

A dozen men obeyed the order, and Yreka Jim submitted to the indignity without a demur until the job was complete, and, although standing erect, he was powerless to move either hand or foot.

Then he spoke:

"Gentlemen, I am your prisoner, and so far as I am concerned, you have it in your power to make what disposal of me you see fit. Regardless of what it shall be, I hereby, before you all, place my curse upon this camp under its present rule, and upon all who have been concerned in my arrest, or have to do with my further disposal. Until I run the camp of my own sweet will, no luck will ever come to it. I have said my say, now, and you can do the remainder of the talking, if there is any to be done!"

"You have talked quite enough!" St. Maur declared, "and if I were in Mr. Alvin's place, I'd make you dearly suffer for your temerity, as you ought to. Hanging is too good for you, and if I have got any influence you will get worse than that!"

"Thank you! Do your worst, while you can, as my turn will surely come," Yreka replied, calmly.

A strong guard was placed over him, armed with six-shooters, while the judge, St. Maur, and several others went one side and engaged in an earnest consultation.

This detention meant no small loss, to the sport. Should he be held under arrest until ten o'clock the next morning it meant the loss of all he had in the world, nearly!

The cattle-ranch in Vista Valley, was covered for its entire value, by a mortgage of \$5,000. When Yreka and Martha McKardless (See "Yreka Jim's Prize," BEADLE'S HALF-DIME LIBRARY No. 372,) had bought it, they had paid down all their cash, except enough to stock the range with, and a balance of five thousand was left on mortgage, for a few months, with the proviso that if not then paid, on three days' grace, the ranch and all its increase should revert to its former owner, and Yreka would forfeit all that had been paid.

As that sum was over thirty thousand dollars, it will be readily seen that his failure to meet the mortgage would be a thing of disastrous importance.

At ten, on the morrow, the last hour of the grace would be up, and the former owner stood only too ready to take advantage of the default of payment.

In vain Yreka had attempted to raise the \$5,000. Ready money was exceedingly scarce—not to be had at any premium, and at last, in desperation, Yreka had bidden Martha good-by, and mounting his horse, set off for some

near-by mountain mining-town in hopes of being able to make enough at the faro-table to lift the mortgage.

Now his plans seemed baffled.

CHAPTER III.

THE JUDGE AND ST. MAUR.

No delay was made, at the conclusion of the conference of dragging Yreka Jim from the Buckin' Cayuse to the strong cabin, which had been erected to serve as the local jail.

It was small, built of a double thickness of logs, and, once locked within its walls, a prisoner certainly had but very little show of getting out.

In this den Yreka Jim was tumbled, and left to ponder over his situation, his captors taking their departure, after turning the key on him.

Then Judge Alvin made the announcement that St. Maur would not deliver his lecture until the following evening, after which the two sought the judge's residence.

Although constructed chiefly of logs, it was by far the most pretentious habitation in the camp, boasting of numerous apartments, including a well-furnished parlor, into which the judge conducted his guest.

When the two were comfortably seated, on either side of a table, the judge produced a box of cigars, and opened the conversation.

"Well, St. Maur, your arrival is a source of great pleasure to me," he said, lighting one of the weeds, and puffing a cloud of smoke ceilingward. "As you see, there is urgent need that the people of Red Nose shall be worked up to enthusiasm on the subject of prohibition, before it is too late."

"Exactly, sir—exactly," St. Maur assented, graciously. "I am glad I arrived, as I did, for I readily perceive that the people are not all in active sympathy with your pet hobby, and that a man who would represent them, on license, would clearly get their vote. But, I understand your case perfectly, my dear sir, and am aware that for you to lose your present prestige would be a great loss to you, in finance, in popularity and in peace of mind. Am I not right?"

"You certainly are. By all means, fair or foul, I mean to maintain sole power and authority here."

"And to that end, what do you propose to do, may I ask?"

"Whatever necessity may demand. I am not a man to stand on trifles. The first and most important thing is for you to harangue the crowd with your utmost eloquence, and thus maintain my ascendancy."

"My mission here is as a temperance laborer, and as I came at your invitation, I shall naturally aim to be of what satisfaction I can to you, providing, of course, the remuneration is within keeping of the value of my services."

"Oh, I'll see to it that that is all right," the judge said, promptly. "You exert yourself to suppress this treason to my authority, and you will have no reason to complain about the pay, I assure you, sir."

"I trust not—indeed, I am satisfied, not. It so happens, however, that I strike your model young city broke to a single dollar, and so must request a loan—not pay in advance, but a loan. I have a large and valuable diamond here, which I will deposit with you in security for the loan I must secure—of five thousand. The stone is worth seven thousand, at any rate."

It was a heavy gold ring, with an extraordinarily large stone setting, that scintillated brilliantly in the lamp-light.

Although Judge Alvin's money-bags were plethoric, he was by no means a judge of diamonds, never having indulged in such a luxury himself; but the appearance of the ring was dazzling and attractive, and he tucked it away in his pocket.

"Oh, certainly I'll accommodate you, sir, and I believe you will labor all the more earnestly in my interests," he said.

"Most assuredly I will," the apostle declared, as he received the desired sum, which the judge procured from his safe. "You will find me indefatigable in my efforts in your interests. I have a plan to propose, which I think you will, after due deliberation, eagerly advocate. It appears to me to be the most feasible of any I have yet conceived."

"Then, let me hear it at once. By the way, on the quiet, if conversation parches your throat, I have a little unfermented wine—perfectly harmless, you know—which I know to be an excellent tonic."

And, going to the closet, the judge brought forth a couple of glasses, and a bottle of Burgandy, from which he knocked off the neck, with the skill of a professional club bartender.

The Hon. Charles St. Maur did not appear surprised, but smiled knowingly, as he poured out a glass, and tossed it off.

"It is all right," he said. "Discreet wine is beneficial to any one, and who is better entitled to its benefits than we whose aim it is to save men from drunkards' graves? No one, to be sure, and I am glad to find you the judicious man you are."

"Bravo!" the judge said, filling the glasses to the brim, a second time. "You are a man after my own heart, and I am glad we have met. Here goes! And, now that we understand each other, open your plan furnace, and let me see the light."

"Of course I will. Just one more glass, thank you. It is excellent stuff, the very thing to put one's head and hand in condition for work. But, before the plan, what disposal is to be made of this Yreka Jim?"

"That is the all important question, on which I have not as yet formed a decision."

"Well, I suppose the committee will vote that he be fined and banished from the town."

"That much, at the least, as that is one of the local ordinances."

"Well, then, we will consider matters from this point. If he is let off this easy he has sworn to return. He will do it if he has to do so in disguise, and he will try to organize an opposition party to elect him to rule over this camp."

"I fear so!"

"Then but one course remains for you to pursue: you must issue a notice announcing yourself as candidate for mayor, on the prohibition ticket. Campaign tactics must be adopted. Let there be two parties. Allow Yreka Jim the freedom of the camp, and to become the nominee on the other ticket!"

"Furies!" the judge gasped. "Are you mad, man?"

"By no means. Do as I say, and I will be a go between, and with your money, will easily win the day; then we will sweep the opposition party from Red Nose. The canvas will make plain to us just who are for our side, and can be depended on. The others can be handled then to our liking. We can drive them from the town and pocket all that they forfeit by being forced to evacuate! If the thing is shrewdly worked we can fix matters so that you will own Red Nose, as an entirety; then, open the camp as a whisky hole and dispose of your possessions to such an advantage as to realize, in hard cash, ten times their present value. Where your possessions are to-day worth a hundred thousand dollars, they can be made worth a million in a month if you let me engineer the thing!"

The judge looked both surprised and interested, as he refilled the glasses.

"True!" he said. "I see that you are a diplomat in your way, and I am not sure but I regard your plan favorably. It will require most careful execution, and I shall have to sleep over the matter, ere I can consent to give it the consideration it is entitled to."

After a little further conversation, Chipeway Charley took his departure, leaving the judge in a very speculative frame of mind.

The adder had planted his first sting!

CHAPTER IV.

VISTA VILLA.

LOOKING down from the mountain ledge, where we saw Yreka Jim prior to his visit to Red Nose, Vista Valley and the hacienda-like ranch by the silvery winding stream, seemed beautiful indeed—a landscape fairer than one would often encounter in that section of the Far West.

But down in the valley, close to the veranda-surrounded habitation, the prospect was still more charming.

The hacienda and a few out-buildings in its rear were surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, and within the inclosure was a series of white graveled walks, a profusion of flowers and scrubs, rose-bushes and young trees that had been recently placed there as improvements.

The floor of the front veranda was painted white and contained flower-pots, a settee, while a large, shaggy Newfoundland dog lay stretched out in front of the door, as if on sentinel duty.

It was a bright, sunny morning, that which followed the arrest of Yreka Jim. At the ranch birds were singing around the veranda, and not far away the herders were driving the cattle out to feed, as they galloped here and there, their merry song and shout making the air musical.

Within the hacienda a woman's figure fitted

about; then, at intervals she came out upon the porch and gazed expectantly to the northwestward.

She was a pretty creature, not yet of age, possessed of a shapely figure, a bright intelligent countenance, and one particular characteristic that added rather than detracted from her appearance—a head of hair of the brickiest color.

She was attired in a calico wrapper, and with slippers upon her feet, and roses arranged at her throat, looked inexpressibly charming.

This was Yreka Jim's wife—the heroic Martha McKandless, who in Tarpot's magic city, had put herself up at a lottery to save Yreka's life.

"I wonder why Yreka don't come?" she said, speaking more to the big Newfoundland than to herself. "If he had won, he surely would be back, ere now, and if he did not win, he surely would hasten his return, and not leave me to face that terrible Van Gelder, unless—"

She grew pale as a terrible thought flashed across her mind.

She knew that when Yreka tenderly kissed her, and rode away from the valley home, the noon before, he was in a mood bordering on fierce desperation. His temperament was such, that he would not come back without the money, without a life-and-death struggle to get it.

Fearless dare-devil that he had ever been, if he could get money in no other way would he not play his life against a sufficient sum to raise the mortgage?

Men had been known to commit such rash acts before! Men of means were there, in plenty, who would be willing to risk a large sum on so exciting a game.

The very thought made her feel sick, and she hastened back into the house to distract her mind over her wifely duties, but remained for a few minutes only. Anxiety deeply impressed on her pretty face she soon reappeared, to anxiously scan the valley again.

But she looked in vain.

The cattle had been driven out to feed, and the herders were coming in, by her own request, to be near the hacienda, in case of trouble.

The clock on the mantle chimed the hour of eight; then, half-past eight and then, nine.

At ten, the time was up, on the mortgage, and Von Van Gelder could take possession then in spite of anything either Yreka or Martha could do; that was the agreement.

And that he would be on hand, by or before ten, was morally certain.

One hour yet, and no signs of Yreka's coming.

Poor Martha re-entered the dwelling, and throwing herself upon a couch, buried her face in her hands, and wept.

All hope was now gone, and she foresaw what the result would be.

The home which they had bought, beautified and been so happy in would be wrested from them, and they would lose all they had invested.

Even the horse-stock would have to go, to satisfy the claims of the herders, who had kindly waited upon Yreka for wages, knowing of the effort he was making to lift the mortgage.

They would have to go out into the world and begin anew, then, on the three thousand dollars which Martha had in her pocket—all but two of enough to send Vox Van Gelder away without a claim upon Vista Villa, as Yreka had named the homestead.

There was no earthly use of expecting a particle of leniency from Van Gelder, for he had emphatically told them that when they had bought the ranch.

He was a hard-hearted, unprincipled man of the world, who had parted with the place at a sacrifice, for ready cash, to help him square a gambling debt.

He had told Yreka that he would give him precisely seventy-two hours' grace, after the mortgage came due, as the agreement explicitly stated.

Van Gelder was a sort of polished border-ruffian, and, although honorable enough to pay a gambling debt, he was the last person to grant mercy to a man in his power.

He had made his boast that he would have the ranch back in his possession, and now it appeared very probable that he would.

Oh! why did not Yreka return?

Over and over poor Martha asked herself this question, as the clock ticked seemingly louder, as if in exultance over the fact that time could not be cheated of its victims.

Hark!

She raises her head and listens.

Can she be mistaken? No! 'tis the rapid thud of horse's feet, and she hears them coming up the valley trail.

Nearer and nearer they come, and with a glad, expectant cry she springs to her feet and rushes out upon the veranda.

A man is just in the act of slipping from the saddle, at the gate.

It is not her husband—not bold, handsome Yreka Jim, but a man enough like him to be his brother!

And yet, as she staggers back and gazes at him in wonderment, he opens the gate and advances toward her, waving a number of crisp greenbacks above his head, with an exultant laugh.

Then, overwhelmed with intense excitement, she reels and falls, her senses leaving her, and all becoming blank.

CHAPTER V.

THE FALSE YREKA.

WHEN Martha recovered consciousness, she found that she was lying on the sofa, but her head had an aching sensation, and her powers of recollection were dazed.

A man was bending over her, and holding camphor to her nose, and she saw it was Yreka—thought it was, naturally, for she had no remembrance of any one's arrival, or that she had been waiting for Yreka—Yreka so brave, kind and true to her.

"The money! the money!" she gasped, as soon as she could gain command of her speaking powers.

"Is safe and ready, when Van Gelder comes, dearest," said he beside her, bathing her forehead. "Lie quiet, now, till you have fully recovered from the swoon, brought on by excitement and anxiety over my unavoidable delay. It is not yet ten o'clock, and I will see if Van Gelder is in sight."

She raised herself upon her elbow, and watched him, as he strode toward the door.

He stepped out upon the veranda, but soon returned.

"Yes—three horsemen are approaching," he said, "and we are all right, Martha. Give me the money, and I have enough to make up the \$5,000."

"How did you raise it, Yreka?" Martha asked, gazing at him curiously, as she took a roll of bills from her dress pocket, and gave it to him.

"At the card-table," he replied, briefly—to her, it seemed, wearily. "Have you your revolver, dear?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Keep it ready for use, out of sight in under your apron. If you see any attempt at shenanigan, do not hesitate to shoot the first one who attempts to use a tool, and I'll finish the rest."

"Do you anticipate trouble, Yreka?"

"Hardly, although there's no telling in advance, and it is best to be on guard."

"True. I am so glad you got the money. I was so fearful that you would not come. And my head feels funny and pains me, now and then, and somehow you look changed."

"Changed? Oh! you haven't fairly got your senses yet. Maybe I am changed—I wouldn't marvel if I was, after the ordeal I had to go through to get the money. I shouldn't be surprised if my hair were turned white. But, there, do not question me now. All is right, and Vista Villa is safe. Here come Van Gelder and two men, who look about of one stamp!"

A few seconds later, Van Gelder's form darkened the doorway.

He was a large, powerfully-built man, with a dark, bearded face, and the faultless dress of a man of the world.

He entered the room, and seated himself, without ceremony.

"Good-morning," he said. "You see I am here pretty punctual."

"Exactly!" was the cool response of the man Martha had called Yreka, but who, as the reader has already inferred, was not Yreka. "I arrived, myself, but a short time ago."

"Ah! you were away, then, for money?" and the tones of the man indicated eagerness.

"Oh! yes. Knowing I had no mercy to expect from you, I went up-country and obtained what I needed. And now, my dear sir, if you will receipt the mortgage, you shall have your money in full."

"Suppose I refuse to accept the money, or receipt the mortgage?" Van Gelder demanded, insolently.

"You can do so, if you like. I have got ample proof that I am prepared to pay it, and I am also ready to eject you from the premises, either

dead or alive, as I may choose, at an instant's notice. Shall I signal my men?"

"No! It is not necessary. If you have the money I will treat you square, although I will tell you candidly that when I sold the place I expected to get it back."

"Well, you never will—at least, not at present!"

The mortgage being produced at this juncture, Van Gelder receipted the final payment.

The substitute Yreka Jim then paid him the five thousand dollars, after which Van Gelder took his departure, accompanied by his two companions.

The assumed Yreka then turned to Martha with open arms.

"Come to me, now, darling!" he said. "At last our home is secured, and there is nothing to disturb our future peace and happiness. Are you not glad?"

She gazed at him, in a dazed sort of way, but did not offer to enter his embrace.

"Yes, I am glad, Yreka, but—but, why is it you seem strange to me—so different from what you ever have been? I cannot make you seem like your old self. I—I think I will lie down awhile. I do not feel right—my head—something is the matter with it."

"All right, dear. Lie down and rest, and let Ellen attend to all the household cares. I have an errand down at Nelsonville, and will take advantage of your rest to make the trip. By-bye, now, and do not worry if I am delayed, as I must get this mortgage and deed fixed up properly, and may not get back until the evening!"

He caught her in his embrace and kissed her, and then was gone.

While she sunk back upon the couch with something like a shudder of repugnance.

"My God! what is it?" she gasped. "Why is it the sight of him I so loved this morning, now fills me with dread and horror? Oh! I cannot understand it. He seems changed and different; and—and— Oh! Yreka! what has happened? Am I going crazy?"

She buried her face in her hands, and remained thus.

She heard some one enter the cabin, go into the bedroom, then soon come out again, and leave the house.

She believed it was Yreka, and supposed he was going for some ammunition, and so did not look up.

For hours she lay in a semi-stupor, and at last, when she arose, her brain was no clearer.

She wandered aimlessly about the house, and every once in a while, her lips seemed to involuntarily mutter:

"Something is wrong. A change has come over Yreka, and some subtle intuition warns me that something is wrong."

Later she saw one of Yreka's coats lying on a chair—the same he had worn the day before. He had evidently changed it for another, before going to Nelsonville.

Idly, and without any particular motive, she went through the pockets, gazing vacantly at the contents she drew forth, until—

Her gaze fell upon an unenveloped letter, in feminine chirography, when her eyes brightened with eagerness, and a sudden suspicion seemed to enter her mind.

She seized the letter, bore it to the light, and perused it, her face changing in expression.

The letter was dated from Cheyenne, W. T., and ran as follows:

"'Tis said that hell hath no fury like a scorned woman's hate! What, then, can you expect from me? I am after you, but do not expect you will be where I send this letter, when I arrive there. But, that makes no difference; I will find you and be revenged upon you, if I have to follow you to the ends of the earth. Beware, cruel wretch! When I strike, you will believe the saying, above quoted."

"Your wronged wife."

"FAITH."

Over and over did Martha read this letter, her face growing whiter and more rigid each instant.

"I know, now!" she moaned at last, "why it was that his very approach was repugnant to me. He has another wife, and I am—oh! God!—henceforth an outcast!"

Then, for a second time that day, she tottered, and fell!

CHAPTER VI.

THE TERRIBLE TRIO.

WHEN Yreka Jim found himself alone in the strong cabin, and so helplessly bound that he could scarcely stir a limb, all of his former coolness temporarily left him, and his face grew stern with passion.

"All is lost now," he gritted, "and I owe it partly to these Red Nose ruffians! True, I ought to have been more discreet than to have shown the liquor; but, by my soul, I believe this alleged temperance policy to be but the cloak to something a hundred per cent. worse than the liquor curse! The man Alvin is no saint, I'll agree, and it looks to me but natural that his professed enmity to liquor is to abet his interests in some other scheme. If I ever get out of this den, by Heaven he shall feel the weight of my hand! Poor Martha! what will she think of me—what will she do? Van Gelder will eject her from the premises, and I will not be present to protect and comfort her unless something happens different from what I have any reason to expect, for there is no probability that these devils will fetch me up for trial, to admit of my reaching Vista Villa in time to prevent the foreclosure of the mortgage."

The very thought of the ranch being swept from his grasp, after he and Martha had expended so much money on it, was galling in the extreme, and the more he reflected the fiercer grew his anger, until he ground his teeth with intense rage.

But 'twas useless, this passion. He had not been bound that he might escape; indeed, the strength of a giant could scarcely have burst asunder the bonds which held his limbs together.

"It will be a dear night's work for the folks of Red Nose!" he hissed; "unless, indeed, they kill me outright, and thus prevent me from striking back. Vista Villa and a happy home may be snatched from me, but—curse them!—they shall pay me back, dollar for dollar, for what I lose. I swear it!"

From Martha and her prospective troubles his thoughts reverted to St. Maur, or Chipeway Charley, as Alvin had called him.

"I have heard of the man before, but never dreamed that he would cross my path. Though a thorough scoundrel he has an excellent reputation, and his coming to Red Nose is not without significance. At any rate, it is only too evident that he and I are enemies from the start, and that he will use all his ingenuity to crush me. Let him do it; if I ever get out of here, two can play at the same game!"

The hours dragged by, slowly, and the bustle about the town died out, by which he drew the inference that it was past the hour of midnight.

The night outside, was clear and moonlit, and the single barred window of the jail, admitted sufficient light for Yreka to form a fair idea of his surroundings, and realized that it would be next to impossible for him to escape, even were he not bound.

It must have been somewhere near two o'clock, when he fancied he heard voices, outside the jail, which caused him to listen, intently.

It was but a moment ere he heard a repetition of the sound, which convinced him that he was right.

What did it mean?

Was the Committee, headed by Judge Alvin, coming to pay him a night visit, and perhaps make a final disposition of him?

The thought was not particularly a pleasant one, and he set his teeth together hard.

Presently, he heard some one tampering with the lock, for it was a padlock and hasp which fastened the door, from without.

Evidently, whoever they were they had no keys to the jail.

This fact, in itself, convinced Yreka Jim that the parties outside were not Judge Alvin and the Committee, as they would possess the keys.

Who, then, was it?

It was a question as quickly answered, for the door swung open, and two persons entered, one carrying a bull's-eye lantern, the light of which was partly turned on.

Both persons were closely masked, attired in rough, ill-fitting garments, including stogy boots, and slouch hats, and wore pistols in their belts.

The man who carried the lantern was the shorter of stature, but well-shaped and wore his hair down over his shoulders. If he wore any beard, it was not visible, on account of the mask.

His companion was big—almost a giant, in size—broad-shouldered, and evidently a person of prodigious strength. A matted sun-bleached beard flowed from behind his mask.

The man with the lantern, who was evidently the leader, flashed the light about, until it fell upon the prostrate form of Yreka Jim, when he said:

"Ah! yes, he is here yet," addressing his com-

panion. "You are Yreka Jim, I suppose, sir?"
 "That's the title I usually travel under," Yreka replied, coolly. "Who are you?"
 "I am Captain Faith, of the Terrible Trio—Faith, Hope and Charity." My companion here is Hope. He hopes some day to be able to make a haul, that will take him out of his present business—that of a robber and cut-throat!"

"Indeed? Then, I suppose I may infer that your visit here was made with a view of satisfying one of the vices mentioned, eh?" Yreka remarked, with an effort to rise to a sitting position.

"On the contrary, no. Learning of the circumstances of your incarceration, we came to do you a favor—that is, a sort of a favor. Have you any idea what fate is in store for you, if you remain here in the jail until morning?"

"Not in the least. I may be used for a barbecue, hung up by the neck, or planted to stay!"

"Neither of those plans of action have been adopted. It is the intention of the Committee to tar and feather you first, and then, having bound you so that you are helpless, send you for a long ride on a wild mustang, which has recently been captured, and brought here. A sure and terrible death would be the result, you see."

"Which for—the mustang, or myself?"

"You, of course."

"I am not so sure about that. It just occurs to me that I passed through such an ordeal, once upon a time!"

"Indeed! Well, I dare say you would hardly survive a second experience. We have come to take you from the jail, and to our stronghold. Before you go, you may as well know our characters. By honest people, we are called cut-throats and robbers, but, in reality, we are only robbers, as bloodshed cannot be truthfully charged upon us. Are you willing to accompany us?"

"Do you propose to give me my liberty?"

"After a visit to our stronghold, yes."

"And why take me there first? If I am to have my freedom at your hands, for Heaven's sake let me have it at once, as a mission of the most vital importance calls me away from this vicinity."

"That will be impossible, sir. Our rules are not to be broken, nor is our resolve. You have but one choice—go with us, or remain here, as you like!"

The tone of voice of the speaker was suspicious, for first he spoke in a hoarse voice—again his speech was decidedly feminine.

"How long will I be detained at your stronghold?" Yreka demanded.

"Not long; but the length of time will depend upon the decision of the third member of the Trio, Charity!"

Yreka regarded the speaker curiously, wondering not a little what the Trio could want of him at the stronghold.

Was it but a ruse to get him from the jail, and make way with him? Hardly, he concluded, for, if so, they could take him whether he was inclined to go or not, and not stop to consult his choice.

Then, what object could the two have in taking him to the third one of this party?

Captain Faith broke in upon his brief silence.

"Come! We have no time to tarry, in order to give you a chance for deliberation. The Queen is not one of the most patient."

"The Queen?"

"Yes—Charity. You will find her a queen!"

"Then she is a woman?"

"No—she is a lady!"

"Ah! That alters affairs. Excuse me for not saying lady first. But I suppose you know that I am invulnerable against female coquetry, being a married man."

"That's nothing to do with our mission. We have our orders, and intend to act in accordance with them."

"Well, I don't see that I am to be benefited by going with you—so I might as well stay here. If I have my freedom at all, it is imperative that I have it at once, otherwise I am not so particular about having it at all."

"Nonsense! You must accompany us to see the Queen. She will not detain you long, I dare say, when she knows your wishes. Stay here, and I have already outlined what will be your fate!"

"Not even the prospect of that would induce me to accept my liberty, sir; but if I may obtain my liberty a little sooner than though I were to remain here, I will accompany you."

"You are sensible. You must permit us to

blindfold you, as the location of our stronghold is a secret, known to but the three of us."

Yreka did not object—indeed, it was useless for him to think of doing so.

A thick handkerchief was fastened over his eyes, then he was assisted to a standing position, and the cords removed from about his ankles.

"Now, Hope will lead you," the captain announced—and beware! Make no attempt to escape, as that will prove your death-warrant!"

The brawny individual who had been characterized as Hope, at once seized Yreka by the shoulder, and the order to move was given.

The trio left the jail, and quietly passed along the single main street for some distance, when another cabin was entered, and the door closed and locked.

Yreka Jim was then seized bodily in the arms of Hope and borne down a series of steps, into what was evidently an underground apartment, or cellar.

Here he was placed upon his feet again, and the cords quickly and deftly replaced about his ankles.

The handkerchief was next removed from before his eyes, and he was enabled to gaze about him.

He was standing in the center of a large cellar, which was reached by way of a series of rickety steps, commencing at a trap door in the floor above.

The walls of the cellar were built of plank, and a floor had been constructed of the same material. The place had little or no ventilation, but was not altogether cheerless.

In one corner was a neatly-arranged cot-bed; a few chairs and a table occupied positions elsewhere, while upon the walls were several pictures of a common order.

A lamp suspended in a bracket from the ceiling lit up the room sufficiently so that all objects were clearly discernible.

Seated upon a chair near where Yreka had been halted, was a woman—at least her attire so indicated, and was of rich and costly material and effect.

Her face was masked, like the faces of Faith and Hope, but a person gazing at her would have decided her to be young and beautiful, for there was the unmistakable pose and grace of youth and beauty in her movements, attitude and manners.

Diamonds glittered upon her lily-like fingers, and pended from her shapely ears—jewels of rare value and beauty.

"You are Yreka Jim," she said, more positively than interrogatively, when the bandage had been taken from before his eyes.

"That's what I generally get, when I'm mentioned!" was Yreka's characteristic response.

"In former days you were a road-agent sir?"

"I once upon a time acquired the unenviable reputation of being one, whether I deserved it or not! But, how did you become aware of the fact, pray, when it was miles from here where I received the distinction?"

"That matters not. Your reputation is not unknown to me. A man seldom loses his reputation, be it good or bad. Of late you have acquired the notoriety of doing some clever detective work."

"Perhaps—really, I cannot say as for that, owing to my innate modesty!"

"Pooh! False modesty, you mean. You came here to Red Nose for a purpose."

"Most assuredly. I have a purpose for nearly all I say or do. Is that not the case with yourself?"

"That does not matter to you, sir. You came to Red Nose for a purpose, and that purpose was to break up the Terrible Trio!"

She spoke fiercely, and her fingers closed tightly, as in anger.

"And is that the reason I was brought here?" Yreka asked.

"It was, to a certain extent."

"Then I will relieve you of your anxiety by assuring you that such is not the case. The existence of your Terrible Trio, as you express it, was wholly unknown to me until your companions visited me at the jail, and made known their calling."

"Are you prepared to swear that it is a fact?"

"Certainly I am. What I state positively is truth every time; you can bet your best diamond on that!"

The Queen of the Terrible Trio was silent a few moments, during which time she gazed steadily at the sport through the eye-holes of her mask.

"What attitude do you propose to assume relative to the affairs of Red Nose and its people?" she finally asked.

"That I have not definitely decided. If I can gather enough people about me, I may run for mayor."

"Then, you propose to risk the wrath of the mayor and his followers, and go boldly into the camp, do you?"

"Certainly! They have no power to forbid me the rights of a citizen."

"Are you not afraid they will string you up?"

"I shall run all such risks. Fear and I never did quite agree, and I guess there's no negotiations yet toward making us fast friends. I reckon the sensible people of Red Nose will pause to consider, before they try to eat me alive—that is, of course, providing I am personally present."

"If you ran for mayor, you would depend upon the rougher class to support you?"

"Not altogether. I should appeal to all classes on the plea of a fair, open and honest government, leaving the question of license or no license to the majority. The people alone have the right to say whether liquor shall be sold in Red Nose or not."

"In short, you oppose the monopoly and tyranny of Jeremiah Alvin?"

"Perhaps. I am not in love with the man, and I dare say he has no tender feelings for me."

"You are right!" and the robber Queen spoke with emphasis. "The more you know of him, the more you will grow to dislike him, until, when you come to a knowledge of his true character you will wonder why you did not kill him when you first met him. And now, what attitude do you propose to assume toward us?"

Yreka shrugged his shoulders:

"That's a pretty tough question!" he responded, eying her with a searching scrutiny. "As an advocate of what is honest and best, one would hardly expect me to consort with robbers."

"Certainly not. No one has intimated a desire of that kind. If you leave this place at all, it must be without the least idea of who we are or where our rendezvous is located. This will prevent you from feeling compelled to make open war against us, even though you know of our existence. As long as you remain unaggressive we pledge you our support, knowing our ability to give it to you, in more ways than one. In braving the people of Red Nose you will be surrounded by danger, constantly, and brave though you may be, there will no doubt be times when but for assistance you would go under. That assistance shall not be lacking. All we ask of you is that you will not take your own life by seeking us—that and one thing more!"

"And, what is that?"

"That you will pledge yourself never to rest, until you have wrested from Jeremiah Alvin his wealth, his power and the secret of the fate of one whom you hold most dear!"

"What! Speak out—whom do you mean?"

And Yreka's face became pale, while his eyes grew lurid.

"Listen!" the Queen commanded; "I foresee trouble ahead; I foresee a terrible fate in store for your wife, which will inflame you with one passion—a desire for revenge. I, too, seek revenge, but propose to make you my instrument. Directly or indirectly, which I cannot tell, at present—this man Alvin will be concerned in your wife's trouble."

For a moment, Yreka stood like one thunder-struck. What did it mean? Was there truth in these predictions? Could human beings look into the future and outline what was destined to take place?

"You certainly have a strong talent for guessing," he remarked. "You evidently are more familiar with my little family affairs than I supposed."

"Not at all—not at all. I never saw you before, nor your wife, but I know that you are married, and I see trouble in store for you both."

"Perhaps you can tell me my wife's name, then?"

"Certainly. It was Martha McKandlass before she married you. There was some jealousy connected with the match, it appears, but she saved your life, and won you by lottery."

Yreka could scarce repress an exclamation.

"Perhaps you can go back into my past, and reveal that!" he said.

She was silent several seconds, but finally shook her head.

"No; your past is shrouded in mystery to me at least. I could tell you a name that was yours by right of birth, but I do not think you would care to have it mentioned, even here."

A rift of pallor passed over the sport's face. "Write it on a slip of paper!" he gasped. "That is useless. The initials are E. A." "By heavens! you are infernal!" he articulated, his face depicting great astonishment. "Oh! no, not quite that. I am Charity, the robber Queen, and my time is limited. You have work to do, and can now illy waste time in useless conversation. Promise what I requested of you, and you are assured of any assistance we can silently give to you."

"And if I refuse?" "You will be found dead on the main street of Red Nose, in the morning!"

"Very well. I accept your proposal—or, rather, your terms, on one condition:—which is, that I find trouble really has come to my wife!"

"It is a bargain! I will require no oath from you; your simple word is all-sufficient. And, now, we will drink to your success, and mine; then, you shall be conducted outside of Red Nose, and set at liberty."

She took a bottle from a table, and with its contents filled a glass.

"Drink!" she ordered, "it seals our compact."

He obeyed, draining the glass.

She refilled it, and with a bow drank in return.

"We will blindfold you now," she said, "and Faith and Hope will take you hence. Remember! we shall ever be near you and expect you to carry out your part."

"Very well!"

The bandage was then placed over his eyes, he was led up-stairs, and out of the dwelling.

From that moment he knew no more, until he awoke, upon the great ledge overlooking Vista Valley and his villa. He was no longer bound, and his weapons and watch were intact.

"Have I been asleep? Has all this been a nightmare?" he gasped sitting erect.

He looked at his watch.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon.

Then, gradually, everything came back to him.

"Lost! lost!" he gasped, springing to his feet. "It is no dream. I was drugged, and Vox Van Gelder has foreclosed on the ranch. Martha! Oh! Martha! where in God's name are you?"

And the gaunt crags, and sighing foliage seemed to catch up the query, and mournfully echo—"where?"

Swiftly passing his hand over his forehead, as if to shut out a hideous vision, Yreka Jim uttered a cry not unlike that of an infuriated panther, and hurried from the spot, where, the afternoon before, he had sat his saddle, and gazed lovingly down toward the villa that held the pride of his heart's honest love.

CHAPTER VII. YREKA JIM AGAIN.

RED NOSE, or more correctly, the people of that characteristic burg, had been pretty thoroughly excited over the incident attending the arrest and incarceration of Yreka Jim; consequently the camp was early astir on the following morning, for the impression was prevalent that some "fun" was in store at Yreka's expense.

But, as the reader knows, Yreka did not remain in jail to be passed upon by the committee, and when the fact became known that he had taken leave not only of the jail, but of Red Nose, in the bargain, the excitement became tremendous.

Of course he had not escaped unaided, for the lock of the jail had been broken by outside parties, and nothing was more probable than that Yreka Jim was abroad, alive and active.

And there was not a person, perhaps, in all the camp who entertained a doubt but what the dashing man from Vista Valley would be as good as his word.

Jeremiah Alvin was nearly beside himself with rage at the escape, but, having decided to enter into the scheme St. Maur had proposed, he said very little to any one, but set about preparing for the work ahead.

Failing to find St. Maur, who left a note at the Buckin' Cayuse to the effect that he would be absent the better share of the day, Judge Alvin employed a local painter, and the result was, a huge banner containing the following notice and mounted against the front of the hotel:

"PROCLAMATION!!

"FOR MAYOR OF RED NOSE,

"JEREMIAH ALVIN,

"THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE!

"Judge Alvin, so well and popularly known as the friend of the laboring man, and the foe of intemperance, takes pleasure in announcing himself as candidate for Mayor of Red Nose on the Prohibitionist ticket. Every honest man, and all in favor of good, moral government, and good wages, are requested to cast their vote for Prohibition and Morality!"

Another notice was posted later, viz:

"ELECTION!

"Citizens are notified that the first election of Red Nose will take place on the 20th instant, for the purpose of electing a suitable man to the office as Mayor.

"Let every man vote for Judge Alvin, the town's foremost supporter, and for Prohibition."

Still another notice went up during the day:

\$100 REWARD!

"To Whom It May Concern:—

"The above reward will be paid for the arrest of a man known as Yreka Jim, on the charge of inciting trouble by attempting to vote and cause others to vote for open bars and intemperance. \$100 additional will be paid for information leading to the arrest of the men or parties who assisted said Yreka Jim to break out of jail.

"JUDGE JEREMIAH ALVIN,
Prohibitionary Candidate for Mayor."

All of these notices created wide-spread attention, and excited various comment by the people.

The temperance element—for there were a number of people in the camp who regarded total abstinence as the correct thing—were enthusiastic in their approval of the stand the judge had taken.

Whatever opinion his opponents had was not loudly expressed, for there was yet no knowing how matters were going to turn out.

During the latter part of the day St. Maur returned, and he and the judge had a long and confidential interview. In the evening, bonfires were rebuilt, and, taking a stand, which had been built for his accommodation, St. Maur delivered a lecture upon the evils of intemperance and the good resulting from a prohibitionary administration.

It was certainly an eloquent and sensible appeal, for the villain diplomat was a man of fine oratorical powers, and of pleasing presence; so the address was received with enthusiasm by many, and was respectfully listened to by all.

After the address, St. Maur was treated to a feast, similar to the one that Yreka Jim had enjoyed the previous evening.

Several days passed, and Red Nose became as quiet and monotonous, as though no such person as Yreka Jim ever had disturbed its peace.

St. Maur remained at the hotel, and ingratiated himself into the favor of every one he possibly could. He had a clever faculty of getting acquainted, and was even more popular among the liquor men than with the Prohibitionists.

"Oh! things are going splendidly!" he would say, when questioned by the judge. "Numbers of the men who have hitherto been quietly in favor of license have pledged themselves to support you, and by shoving out a few more greenbacks I am confident of an overwhelming majority."

And gratified over his prospective triumph, the judge would "shell out," right liberally.

While, with the innocent old fool's money, the cute St. Maur would mingle among the for-licence men, and slip them a V once in awhile, on the quiet, remarking:

"Remember! You like your nip—and mum's the word. When you go to the polls, if you want your way, vote for Charles St. Maur!"

And, one by one, with a nod of approval, these men would openly announce their intention of standing by Judge Alvin!

Such was the state of affairs, when, one night as the main street of the place was alive with people, and the sights peculiar to mining-camp life, a wild—a terrific yell was heard, and a horseman, or at least, a horse, was seen coming down the trail, at breakneck speed.

There was something so awful about the yell that the citizens of Red Nose involuntarily rushed to either side of the street, in alarm.

The saddle upon the horse was not occupied by a human being, but, instead, by a half-grown black bear, whom the wild leaps of the horse had not the effect to dislodge.

The horse, however, had another rider than Bruin.

Seated bareback, behind the bear, and side fashion, at that, was a man, who, from his frantic gestures, appeared to be urging the foam-flecked steed to its utmost speed.

If the bear maintained a good seat, what then could be said of the human rider, who rode as though lashed to the horse, and yet was not,

nor used either hand or foot to keep him upon the horse's glossy back!

Verily, no such wild and reckless riding, had the people of Red Nose ever witnessed, and the sight awed them.

'Twas no need to ask who the approaching dare devil was, for he was a duplicate of Charley St. Maur, who stood upon the veranda of the Buckin' Cayuse.

Yreka Jim was coming!

Yreka Jim was coming, and "comin' like 'ell bent for election," as one man declared, as he sought refuge behind a dry goods box, judging that to be a safe protection from flying bullets.

On came the wild rider!

"Yreka Jim!"

The name passed from lip to lip.

Men looked serious—others excited, and eager.

If excitement was to be the order of the evening, there were plenty who were eager to take a look at the "critter."

It happened that those who looked most serious, were the temperance people, who evidently anticipated that something was likely to happen, and they were the first ones likely to be approached on the subject.

On came Yreka Jim, with speed enough, seemingly, to carry him 'way through the town ere he could check the fiery-tempered steed who bore him.

There were wild and sportive spirits in Red Nose—men, who had roughed it through the wild West and its mineral cities, dating from all periods back to the halcyon days of '49.

And the approaching spectacle seemed to fill them, as of one accord, with enthusiastic delight, for when one brazen-throated miner ventured to send up a yell of approbation, others were not slow to join him, and the cheers of a hundred or more made the welkin ring, as it never rung in Red Nose before.

These cheers had not ceased when, at a word of command, Yreka Jim's horse reared up on its haunches, in front of the Buckin' Cayuse, remaining poised upon its hind feet, for several seconds, then gracefully settling down on all-fours.

At the same instant, Yreka Jim was standing erect upon its back, his hat doffed, and his face pleasant and smiling.

"Gentlemen of Red Nose!" he cried, in a ringing voice, "you will perceive that I am once more with you, and this time, I am here to stay, provided no one has too many overruling objections. Allow me—this is my trump card, Little Joker!"

And, as if thoroughly understanding the introduction, the bear reared up on its hind feet, in the saddle, and thus poised, gazed inquiringly around, with mouth open, and tongue protruding!

CHAPTER VIII. YREKA JIM'S JOKER.

ANOTHER ringing cheer went up, that caused at least two men a pang of envy—Judge Alvin and Chippeway Charley.

Unmindful of what effect his words might have on those individuals, Yreka Jim, smiling, looked over the faces below and around him before he spoke, his keen gaze not missing the judge nor the temperance apostle.

"Gentlemen," he spoke up, directly, "as I before remarked, I am back among you, and I have come to stay. I don't ask your permission to do so—it does not matter a cent whether you want me to stay or not. I'm going to linger, and that settles that! I will still further enlighten you:

"You all know the circumstances of my first visit to your town, and the reception which I was accorded. I came here from my home in Vista Valley to see if a run of luck would not help me to a sum of money I was urgently in need of. I left behind me a true and loving wife. During my incarceration here a serpent entered my home and robbed me, not only of my wife, but I have every reason to believe, robbed her of her life!"

He paused a moment, as if to repress his feelings, then went on:

"This was not all I was robbed of, but it is enough to consider at present. I know whom to accuse when I am ready. Suffice to say that the authors of the crime were from Red Nose, and to the people thereof I look for satisfaction. Had I not been molested as I was, no such crime would have to be answered for. Murder has been done, and by heavens I will have revenge! The men who are guilty—let them tremble!"

"I have more to say. I have a mission to perform, and it is in connection with my ven-

geance. I have come to offer myself to you as a candidate for mayor of your town, in opposition to Judge Alvin and his hirelings."

At this there was a cheer, but it was far from a unanimous expression.

The cheer pleased Yreka, and gave him courage to proceed:

"I don't expect you will *all* support me, and do not solicit your votes with the plea that I will give you license to buy and sell liquor, and get drunk as often as you please; neither am I an advocate of Prohibition. I see that you want a man to take hold of the town and run it, for the people, in the interest of justice and full personal rights. I am here, fellow-citizens, to represent that kind of government. I do not propose to go from man to man, begging his support, nor do I propose to put out money to secure votes, as your big elephant candidate is doing; but, all the same, I *do* propose to be Mayor of Red Nose. So let all vote for Yreka Jim who desire so to do!"

And, with a graceful bow, he leaped from his horse to the street, the bear immediately following his example.

The crowd did not cheer again, but involuntarily swerved to either side, to allow the sport and his singular companion the right of way.

Yreka mounted the steps, and entered the Buckin' Cayuse, Little Joker lumbering along beside him like a pet dog.

He was a fine-looking animal, with a glossy, jet-black coat of hair, and the novel peculiarity of a bushy tail!

Standing upon his hind feet, he was nearly as tall as a man, although as yet not full-grown, and evidently had been so trained as to develop a wonderful amount of intelligence.

On reaching the interior of the Cayuse, Yreka stepped up to the cigar counter, and called for a cigar, at the same time waving his hand to the assemblage.

"Come up, gents, and smoke with your uncle, since you have nothing 'round here to wet one's whistle with. It is my treat, and nothing is too good for those who are my friends. When you all get a weed I'll show you something that will surprise you. I'll introduce to you my quadruped friend, Little Joker, whom I'll back, for any sum, to wrestle any galoot in Red Nose."

"Yas, come up, boyees!" cried the tough who superintended the cigar-stand. "I've got the tin right in my paws, an' every galoot is entitled ter a cigar."

The invitation was not permitted to pass unheeded, and a goodly number of the "cits" availed themselves of the opportunity to smoke, at the sport's expense.

Yreka Jim then caused a ring to be formed in the center of the apartment, which Little Joker promptly entered at a word of command from his master.

"Now, pilgrims, maybe you think a bear can't be learned a thing or two, if rightly educated by a professor—like myself, for instance. I'll endeavor to show you that Joker has graduated from a senior class—and recollect, I give you this entertainment free of charge. Now, then, Joker, stand up."

The bear quickly obeyed.

"Fold your paws across your breast. There—that's right. Now, then, show the gents how you can waltz."

This order was also obeyed, the sagacious animal waltzing around very creditably.

"That's right. Now, Joker, can you sing us a song?"

The bear gave vent to a series of whines, in various tones.

"Good boy, Joker. Now, tell the folks about your habits. Do you smoke or chew?"

A nod in the negative.

"Do you drink whisky and get drunk sometimes?"

An affirmative nod, and Joker licked his chops as if a "horn" would be agreeable at the present time.

The crowd laughed loudly.

"Do you ever eat any one up, bones and all, when you get drunk, Joker?"

Another affirmative nod.

"Well, if that's the case, it's a good thing I brought you to a temperance town," said Yreka, smiling. "If you were going to select any one out of this crowd, on whom to make a meal, which gentleman would you prefer?"

As if fully understanding what was asked of him, Joker turned his head from side to side, and gazed at the spectators who formed the ring.

Then, with one paw, he pointed toward big Judge Alvin, and opened his mouth to its fullest extent!

The judge uttered a horrified oath, and hastily got back among the crowd, while Yreka's hearty laugh was echoed by the spectators.

"Oh! Joker's a connoisseur of what is good, although in this instance I think he has rather descended to walrus-meat, in making the judge his choice. However, that is neither here, nor there. Joker is harmless, unless you go to making too familiar with him; then he is liable to get his mad up. Joker, old boy, can you oblige by standing on your head?"

Bruin shook his head, and kept casting hungry glances toward the spot where he had seen Judge Alvin.

"You can't stand on your head? Well, I am surprised at you. Perhaps you can stand on your fore feet, instead of your hind ones?"

This the bear at once proceeded to do, rearing his hind quarters in the air, and balancing himself on his fore feet!

The crowd, by this time enthusiastic, cheered, vociferously.

"That will do, Joker," Yreka said. "Lie down, now, while I see if I can get up a match for you."

Bruin obeyed; then Yreka turned to his audience, who, he was satisfied, were well disposed and friendly.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Little Joker has been exhibiting to you, a few of his simple tricks, and I am glad to see that you have appreciated them. You have not yet seen all that he can do, for I claim for him the honor of being one of the most expert wrestlers, in America. You will observe that his claws are dull, so that he can injure no one by scratching, who comes in contact with them, and that he will not bite, nor give the bear hug in a wrestling contest, I will guarantee with my life.

"It has been my pride to train Joker, and I am now proud to say that I find it difficult to throw him, myself. That he understands the business of wrestling, in all its various details, can be proven when you see him wrestle.

"Now, I have brought Joker here, with a view to matching him against the best man in Red Nose for any sum of money, not exceeding five hundred dollars, that being the height of my pile, just at present. Understand, however, the terms, before you all speak at once:

"I, personally, will wrestle any man in Red Nose, best two out of three falls. The winner is then to wrestle best two out of three falls with Joker, and if he succeeds in downing the bear, he takes the stakes and the champions honors. If not the money goes to the bear's owner."

"I am ready to enter into that contest, sir, and my money is ready!"

The speaker was Chippeway Charley—St. Maur—who had pushed forward to the edge of the ring!

CHAPTER IX.

EXTRAORDINARY WRESTLING.

THE excitement now grew intense!

It was a well-known fact that the two men were not friends, and this was a sufficient guarantee that a match between them would be strictly on its merits.

So evenly proportioned were they, and alike in muscular development, that there was no easy telling in advance who would be the victor, and that Little Joker could throw either of them, seemed absurd.

Yreka Jim received this acceptance of the challenge with a bow.

Perhaps no one but himself knew that the challenge had been intended for the very man who had accepted; yet, such was the case.

"Very well, sir!" he said; "you as well as any other man, providing you mean to let it be simply a wrestling contest for the stakes, and no more."

"When I wish to fight you I will be the challenger," St. Maur retorted, stiffly.

"Correct! You will find me on hand, any time you may choose to name. Get yourself ready. How do you wish to wrestle?"

"Catch as catch can!"

"Which is satisfactory to me. Here, sir—you hold the stakes!" and Yreka beckoned to the cigar-dealer.

The one thousand dollars was deposited in that worthy's hands; then the men removed all their garments but pants and stockings, and stood before each other, prepared for the struggle.

Two finer built athletes had certainly never come to the scratch, in the history of Red Nose town.

Both were broad-chested, strong-limbed, and

possessed of plenty of hard muscle, and were apparently as equally matched as any two men could be.

Bets were freely made on every hand, but the bettors were careful not to offer any odds.

"By ther silver sand-jigs ov old St. Vitus, they're daisies, tho'!" a coarse, blatant voice cried, and pushing through the crowd came a rough, uncouth, gigantic specimen of humanity of the veriest western bullwhacker type.

"Make way fer ther double-dyed distemper from Devil's Ditch—Mambrinus Maccaw, from Saginaw, who never as yit hed a mither-in-law. Cl'ar the track fer the howlin' hydra-headed he-up-an'-haw from Hadesville! Whoopee! I'm a shadder o' ther portals o' death an' demolition I am, an' I air goin' ter umpire thes leetle game o' ten-pins, or bu'st a boot!"

Elbow people right and left did the giant, until he gained entrance to the ring, where he paused, and, with his hands upon his hips, surveyed the athletes.

In countenance he most singularly resembled the face of a baboon. His nose was ornamented with a huge wart, one of his eyes had been recently blacked; his mouth was huge in proportion, and his face covered with a bristling beard, which was sun-bleached, unkempt, and tobacco-stained.

His dress was coarse and mud-splashed, and he looked as if he had just passed through a hard winter.

As he came to a halt, his face expressed no little astonishment, as his gaze rested upon the face of Yreka Jim.

"Waal, by ther clock-work clog ov old St. Vitus!" he ejaculated, agape with genuine surprise. "What do I see? Aire I ridin' a bevel-edged mid-summer night's dream, or aire my mentuale functions still in a normal condish? Do I perceive that which I see, or aire me cereb'um out o' kilter? No! caluminate my keeracter ef et ain't ther same reprehensibler, riotous, rantankerous cuss—Yreka Jim!"

The sport turned his gaze upon the tough, and an expression of recognition passed over his face. But it was by no means an expression of welcome.

"Slumgallion Sloat!" he cried. "I thought you were dead!"

"Did ye? Waal, then, too, I didn't. Me dead—me, the hydra-headed he-haw-up-an'-geerloo from Gila! Waal, I should twitter in the evening! No, sir-ee, me lark, nary a time dead! I only played it, ther momentuous occasion, up in Wake-Up. Dead!—me? Why yer make my consumptive lungs larf. An' ye've got me dead wrong, too—yer mem'ry bez deleeriously deluded ye. My name is not Sloat—no, never—

"I'm Mambrinus Maccaw,
Of the iron jaw;
So give's yer paw,
An' don't call et a draw.

But go on wi' yer leetle hipperdrome, an' ef I don't play ring-master darn my ducats. Fair an' squar' shell this hyer contest be, an' ary ger-loots as interferences wi' ther ceremonies carries his gaiters wi' him inter infirmity!"

And drawing a pair of huge revolvers from his belt, the bullwhacker flourished them before the eyes of the crowd, to show that he meant to be master of the situation.

"Go ahead wi' yer circus!" he commanded, addressing St. Maur. "I'll see that ye each hev the fair did by ye, an' cuss my boots ef I won't treat ther first man that breaks t'other feller's neck!"

"Is it satisfactory to you to let this fellow be referee?" St. Maur demanded of Yreka.

"Although none too trustworthy, I have no objections," Yreka replied, coolly. "Were it a matter of life and death, it would be different."

"Then, you may act!" St. Maur said, to the bullwhacker. "We are ready!"

"Then, go ahead!" Mambrinus Maccaw (as we shall call him) bawled, evidently not liking the thrust Yreka had given him.

The next moment the men clinched.

For five minutes, locked in an iron embrace, they writhed and twisted about, but neither succeeded in gaining as much as a knee-fall.

It was plain that it was to be a struggle of giants.

In the second five minutes Yreka got his man on his knees twice by superhuman strength, but succeeded in keeping him there only an instant.

Within five minutes more, however, both men were down, and it was but a matter of time and science, when one or the other must touch floor, flat.

Maccaw said not a word, but watched the struggle with as much eagerness as the other spectators, hovering close to the contestants,

watchful that not a vantage point should be lost to either one.

The longer the struggle lasted, the faster became the betting, wagers being quadrupled, in numerous instances.

At last there was a simultaneous yell from every watcher. By an extraordinary effort St. Maur succeeded in getting Yreka straightened out, and thus won the fall!

Then, for several minutes, the room rung with shouts of applause, principally by the temperance element of the camp.

Time was called, and after a short rest the men went at it again.

It was a short and decisive round.

In exactly two minutes, by time, St. Maur was flattened so deftly and forcibly as to nearly take his breath away.

And Yreka did the act with the utmost apparent ease, which set the crowd wild with enthusiasm, and satisfied many that the sport was merely playing with St. Maur in the first round, in order to draw him on.

The third bout soon began.

The treatment meted out to him in the second test seemed to have aroused St. Maur to desperation, and he went about the third savagely, as if to win, by any means.

And after a struggle similar to the first bout, he did win, but there were scores of the crowd who were satisfied that it was a give-away on Yreka Jim's part, in order that the temperance apostle should have a trial with Little Joker.

For, no sooner was Yreka on his back than the bear arose and stretched himself with a sleepy gap, as much as to say:

"Well, I'll try my hand!"

Yreka arose, and bowed to the crowd.

"Mr. St. Maur is entitled to two falls out of three!" he admitted. "We will now see if he can do as well with little Joker."

"We will not!" St. Maur cried, importantly. "I am not in the habit of wrestling with brutes. I won the fall and claim the money."

"Not according to the terms of my challenge!" Yreka responded decidedly. "Unless you carry out the programme you forfeit the money you put up!"

"I'll be cursed if I will! Give me the money, Taylor," and he turned fiercely to the stakeholder.

"Can't do it, Cap, till the biz aire decided," the man replied, doggedly. "The ticket war that the ownership o' the funds war to be decided through the bear."

"Them's ther fac's o' ther case, you bet!" Mambrinus Maccaw chimed in, "an' either yer wrastle ther bar, or yer forfeit the ducats ter Yreka. A feller wot squeals hain't got none o' my compassion, nohow."

The crowd, too, seemed to side against him, and with a malignant look of hatred, St. Maur turned to Yreka.

"All right. Send on your beast. I'll break his back, and your neck, next!"

At a signal from Yreka, the trained bear arose upon his hind feet, and made for his opponent, who stood in pose, awaiting the onslaught.

In an instant Little Joker and the champion were locked in an embrace, which Yreka well knew meant "business" for the insolent St. Maur.

If the people of Red Nose had imagined Yreka Jim to be a mere braggart when he boasted of his wrestling bear, they were destined to see their mistake; for Joker justified what had been said of him.

In five minutes from the time he and St. Maur clinched, the temperance cheat was flat upon his back, and Little Joker standing over him.

Many a cheer had been uttered, in the Buckin' Cayuse, but none that had ever made the building tremble, as now, when full a hundred throats gave proof of their appreciation.

Cursing bitterly, St. Maur regained his feet, and at once clinched with the bear, and a desperate struggle ensued.

But, in an incredibly short space of time, and with a skill that astounded every one, Joker had scored a second fall.

Blind with rage, St. Maur sprung up, and essayed again to clinch with the brute, but this time Joker objected, for with one blow of his right fore paw, the remarkable animal struck the opponent beside the head, and knocked him clean off his feet, upon the floor.

CHAPTER X.

THE TREACHEROUS ATTEMPT.

"GREAT silver-sand jigs of old St. Vitus!" roared Mambrinus Maccaw in his delight, getting down on the floor and keeling over.

"Tork about yer Maces, wull ye—how war

thet, hey? How war thet fer take-em-in-out-o'-the-wet? I tell ye, thet aire anymle exhibits ther symptoms uv who fetched him up, an' eddicated him. Durn my ole mule's propensities fer kickin', ef thet warn't wu'th ridin' a mileyon miles ter see! What d'yer say, boys—let's whoop 'em up, an' twitter three cheers fer Yreka Jim, an' his leetle Joker!"

The proposition was greeted with a yell of approval, and the cheers were given with a force that made the windows clatter in their casements.

To which compliment Yreka Jim smilingly bowed his thanks.

"Thanks, gentlemen! I am glad you appreciate Joker's science!" he said. "Having now entertained you for some time, I trust you will excuse us, until some future occasion."

And receiving the stakes from Taylor, he stowed the money away in his pocket.

"Not yet we won't excuse you!" St. Maur cried, coming forward. "This matter is not settled yet, you low-lived cur! In the first place, I demand my money back!"

"Demanding and getting it are two different things," Yreka coolly replied. "Your money was fairly won, as the audience all stand ready to admit, and I shall most certainly keep it!"

"Will you? We shall see about that. You will not live to keep it. You have grossly insulted me, and you shall fight me and lose your life!"

"I lose my life? Well, I guess not! What will I be doing while I'm losing it?"

"I'll show you!" the villain hissed, and without an instant's warning he sprung toward the sport, with a gleaming knife in his grasp, and his face the picture of rage incarnate.

A cry went up—a cry of warning to Yreka—a cry of horror at his peril.

Every one knew he was unarmed, for they had seen him throw his weapons on the floor, before the contest, and they still lay there.

Yreka realized his danger and deftly dodged the first vicious blow of St. Maur, but the infuriated man still towered above and after him, making lightning strokes, but in his fury using no precision.

Ere any one could raise a hand in defense of the sport, there were two startling incidents, one following the other.

With a savage growl, Little Joker literally bounded upon St. Maur's back.

Simultaneously there was a crash of glass and a pistol report, and a bullet struck the blade of St. Maur's upraised knife, and snapped it from the handle!

Thus, doubly disarmed, it seemed that the villain's fate was sealed, for Joker's paws were wrapped about him in a hug that caused St. Maur's eyes to bulge from his head.

"Help! help! mercy!" he screamed. "Take the brute off!"

"Down him, Joker!" Yreka Jim commanded, and the next instant the apostle was lying sprawling upon the floor, giving Yreka an opportunity to plant his foot upon his throat.

"Now, you cowardly scoundrel!" he cried, sternly, "do you comprehend what you have been doing?"

"Let me up," St. Maur begged, gaspingly. "You are hurting my throat!"

"Am I? How would you like me to stand on it till your life was extinct?"

"Please let me up—I beg of you! I was wrong, and apologize to you!" the craven whined.

"No one has yet asked you to apologize, Charles St. Maur. That is not necessary, for the apology of a snake is slimy and treacherous. You are a wretch of the most disgusting type—a cowardly, sneaking, evil semblance of man, who ought to have died when too young to know of the bad blood in your veins. I have heard of you, before to-night, or last night, and know well whereof I speak, and I would be doing humanity a service were I to kill you where you lay. Lie still, or I may do it yet!"

"Let him up!" cried the voice of Judge Alvin, from among the crowd.

"You keep still—your turn comes next!" Yreka hurled back, fiercely. "As for you, St. Maur, your time is up, here in Red Nose, and you have but one hope for salvation, so far as this life is concerned. Tell me where my wife is, you dastard wretch—surrender me the deed to Villa Vista, and swear to quit this part of the country forever, and I will give you your life, and freedom to go. Refuse! and by the high heaven above me I will stamp your brains out, and grind them into this floor!"

No longer the cool sport, was Yreka Jim. His whole demeanor had undergone a change; he was stern, dark and revengeful.

The crowd stood immovable, not attempting

to rescue St. Maur; indeed, there were few who would have dared face the sport in his terrible anger.

"Speak!" Yreka cried. "Swear by all you hold sacred that you tell the truth in revealing to me where my wife is—swear to leave this place forever, or die the death of a dog! Where is she?"

"I know not—as God is my judge!" the villain gasped, as the avenger's foot grew heavier upon his throat. "Believe me or not, the last I saw of her was when I went to your ranch and paid the money that prevented Van Gelder from foreclosing the mortgage!"

"You did this?"

"I did, and I did more: I went to Nelsonville and had the whole business straightened up, so that there is not a cent of incumbrance upon the property."

"Why did you do this, Charles St. Maur—what was your object?"

"That I decline to tell."

"Out with it, or die!"

"It is a secret, and I'll die before I give it up!"

The villain spoke decidedly, and evidently meant it.

For an instant the sport was tempted to crush the life out of the man, but a second thought caused him to desist.

"Where is my wife?" he hissed.

"I do not know!" was the answer. "If she is not at Vista Villa, where I saw her last, I swear I have no idea as to her whereabouts!"

"I believe you are lying. If I find out you are, nothing will save you. Have you the deed and mortgage?"

"Yes."

"If I release you, instead of killing you as I ought to do, will you give me them and swear to leave this part of the country at once and for good?"

The wretch was silent for a moment, evidently loth to accept such terms even to save his own life.

"I am waiting!" Yreka cried. "One—"

"Curse you! you have the advantage, and there is nothing for me to do but make the best I can out of the situation. I accept; but mind, if I ever meet you elsewhere than in this vicinity, I will cut your heart out!"

"Where are the papers?"

"In my coat. Take them, if you want 'em."

"Oh, I'll do that! First, before you arise, swear to peaceably and quietly leave these parts now and for all time."

"I swear!" St. Maur answered sullenly.

Yreka Jim removed his foot from his throat, and allowed him to rise.

"Get your garments," he ordered, "and hand me the deed and mortgage, but make no attempt to pick up a weapon."

St. Maur obeyed.

His face was flushed, and although consumed with passion, he appeared also to be deeply mortified.

Delivering the papers, he threw on his garments, and elbowing his way through the crowd, left the Buckin' Cayuse, probably the most vengeful man who had ever crossed the threshold of that establishment.

And after him, as if to mock his defeat, a number of the crowd sent hisses and caterwauls of the most tantalizing character.

CHAPTER XI.

A CONFERENCE OVER WINE.

AFTER the departure of St. Maur, a number of Yreka's admirers, hastened to shake him by the hand, an action that brought scowls to the faces of the Alvin element, but they feared any further excitement and one by one silently left the place.

Yreka engaged accommodations for the night, for himself, horse and bear, and, accompanied by the latter sought his room, in quest of a good night's sleep, as the crowd supposed.

But such was not the case. Instead of going to sleep, he left Joker in the room, and dropping out of a window overlooking the rear of the hotel, he hurried away from the vicinity.

In the mean time, burning with rage, Judge Alvin proceeded to his own residence, where, to his surprise, he found St. Maur an occupant of the parlor, the lecturer having hunted up a bottle of wine, which he appeared to be enjoying.

"You here?" the judge articulated, in surprise. "By Heaven! you have nerve!"

"Oh! yes, an abundance of it," St. Maur returned, dryly. "Sit down and make yourself at home."

The judge obeyed, and tossed off a glass of wine to steady his own nerves.

"I thought you had gone for good," he declared. "I suppose you intend to go, how-ever?"

"Not if I know anything about it!" and the villain showed his teeth in a diabolical smile. "Do you think I would sneak away from Red Nose through fear of that mongrel cur, Yreka Jim?"

"Yet you are afraid of him!"

"I am not!"

"Bah! have I not eyes?"

"It matters not. I am not afraid of Yreka Jim, as you will find out before I am through with my dealings with him. I intend to challenge him to meet me in duel and then kill him!"

"You are a fool!" the judge declared. "He would kill you instead. He is a desperate character, and his presence here in Red Nose is an omen of evil to me and my interests."

"So you're afraid of him, too, are you?" and St. Maur laughed, tauntingly.

"Yes, I'll admit I am afraid of him. Did ye hear him sic the brute at me?"

"No, no! The bear singled you out of his own choice. The bay-window on you probably took his eye!"

"I'll have the infernal brute poisoned," the judge blustered. "He is a dangerous nuisance."

"Oh! you furnish the poison, and I'll attend to the rest directly," St. Maur replied. "And now, let's have some more wine. I feel like drinking a whole case, in order to get warmed up for my revenge!"

"It won't do, sir—it won't do. You must keep perfectly sober while in Red Nose, or you will blast all my prospects. I think it will be safer for you to take Yreka's advice, and skip out!"

"Bah! I'll do nothing of the sort. How is it that you are so anxious to have me go?"

"I am not anxious, but I don't see as you have been or can be of any particular good to my interests. I have given you several thousand dollars to expend, and shall not see a dollar's worth of benefit. I don't believe a dozen men have been secured for me from the opposition."

"Who do you suppose they have been influenced for, then?" St. Maur snarled. "D'ye mean to insinuate that I have been misappropriating the money, sir?" and an ugly glare entered his eyes.

"I did not imply any such thing, that I am aware of," the mine-owner responded, nervously. "In fact, your words are the foundation of any suspicion I may have in that line hereafter."

"You hadn't better suspect me of anything like that, if you know when you are well off!" St. Maur gritted. "I am not one of the mildest tempered men, and never fail to retaliate for an insult!"

"No one has insulted you. Be sensible, now, and let the matter drop. If you have expended the money, so be it. At any rate, I am satisfied that it is useless to expend any more in a like manner, as I can see no prospect of getting many votes of the street loafers. And, now, as regards yourself, what do you propose to do?"

"Remain here, in disguise, and watch a favorable opportunity to ring in a dead deal on Yreka Jim!"

The judge regarded the man keenly for a moment.

"Have you fellows ever met before your meeting here in Red Nose?" he demanded, at length.

"Not to my knowledge," St. Maur declared.

"And yet you are implacable foes!"

"Correct!"

"One, if not both of you, have some more important reason for this enmity than the simple trouble since your arrival in Red Nose."

The judge spoke far more positively than interrogatively now.

"How do you know?" St. Maur demanded, quickly.

"I do not know for a certainty, but I surmise that such is the case."

"Oh! well, as far as that is concerned, you may or may not be right; I am sure I am not disposed to say whether you are or not. I dare say our antipathy toward one another is more owing to involuntary aversion than anything else."

"I doubt it. However, I suppose it is none of my business."

"Certainly not. Whatever may be between Yreka Jim and I, we will settle to suit our own notion."

A bottle of wine was nearly emptied during this conversation, and so the judge arose and procured another.

"I like you, St. Maur," he said as he returned to the table—"not because I think you are smart, but because you think so."

St. Maur flushed and his eyes glittered dangerously. "What do you mean?" he hissed.

"I mean that you are, somehow or other, playing for big stakes. In just what way I do not clearly see at present, but I am satisfied that nothing but big money could keep you in Red Nose, with Yreka Jim here ready to drop you at sight."

"You are? Well, all I have to say is that you are a big old fool. True, I have an object in remaining, but I am not afraid of Yreka Jim, as I told you before. If you think I am unworthy of your friendship and trust, say so at once and have done with it. I am not very particular whether we hitch issues or not. My time I can employ profitably elsewhere. In remaining in Red Nose, my motive is as much to be of what assistance to you I can as it is to obtain revenge. If my efforts will not be appreciated I will not make them."

"They will be appreciated, sir, according to their face value. But, excuse me, if it puzzles me why you should take such an *unselfish* interest in my success! However, let that drop, and tell me, candidly, what you think my chances are of election?"

St. Maur drummed idly on the table, a moment, and then answered:

"I don't believe you will stand a ghost of a show, if Yreka Jim is left to cavort around, at his own sweet will."

"And, if he were dead?"

"You would probably get the office, unless—"

"What?"

"Unless I should step in, and snatch it away from you!"

"You?"

"Exactly! I've an idea that I could draw as many free and easy votes, as you could temperance votes!"

"Ah! then that is your game, eh?"

"By no means. If you treat me as your right hand man, you can depend upon me as laboring for your interests. I merely made the suggestion of what I *could* do were you inclined to cast me off, without a penny!"

"Ah! without a penny?"

"Judge Alvin, I said without a penny!"

The judge looked surprised—startled. His face grew a trifle less florid than usual, and he regarded St. Maur, his eyes gleaming strangely.

"It occurs to me I don't quite catch your meaning. In what way am I to understand that you have the claim of a penny. I believe I have given you money enough, to liquidate all my indebtedness to you."

"In one sense, yes!" St. Maur returned, coolly knocking off the neck of the fresh bottle of wine. "In another sense, no. This world is full of stranger things than that, and if you will grant me your ears I'll relate to you a little fable, that will make plain to you why you should take an interest in me, and why I also am so eager and devoted in advancing your personal welfare. Shall I have your attention?"

Judge Alvin had grown still whiter, and an expression of chagrin was upon his face—a hunted look in his eyes.

"Go on!" he ordered huskily. "I am listening!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE BULLWHACKER PUT TO TEST.

ON leaving the vicinity of the hotel, Yreka Jim was absent for several hours, when he once more returned, and joined the throng in the street.

Almost the first man he encountered was the bullwhacker, Mambrinus Maccaw, who was evidently on nettles about something, for he was striding about like a fretted bull.

The moment he spied Yreka, he made for him, and put out his hand.

"Yreka, by gracious! Why, they told me ye war ter bed, an' I war j-est feelin' like kickin' me-self over t'otherside o' ther range an' back. Silversand jigs uv old St. Vitus, but I aire proud an' glad ter see ye. Yreeky, ye deviled duck. Put 'er thar!"

And the broad hand of the giant was extended, heartily.

"I can't say that I am so particularly glad to see you, though," Yreka replied, not deigning to grasp the giant's hand. "In truth, it occurs to me, that I owe you a different kind of a reception, than a hand-shake."

"Now don't, Yreka, go fer me in thet aire on-Christian style, when yer know that I'm yer friend, frum muzzle tew mud-heel. Don't, I

say, fer ther luv o' all yer aunt-sisters and uncles. I ain't no slouch uv a feller, nobow, an' am yours trewly, 'way to bed rock!"

"Oh! not a doubt of it!" Yreka replied, his voice stern and uncompromising. "You are a tricky, filthy, disgusting old sardine, whom I wouldn't trust with the rust off a pin, for fear you'd steal it. Why, some one ought to have fed you to cannibals, years ago. Friend to me, you say, when you and two others of your ilk, tried to lay me out, up near Wake-Up?"

"I swear by ther sweat uv old St. John the Baptist, I warn't 'sponsible fer thet scrape, Yreka. I bed bin on a big spree—durn nigh bed ther hay-fever, ye see, an' bein' out o' scabs ter git a drink o' sody-water wi' I hed ter do suthin'. So, when I war inveigled inter the skeem, I jined it fer two-fold objects—ter raise a wafer, an' save yer life. I did ther one, but didn't git ther wafer. I plugged my pard, an' then hed ter play off corpus, ter keep from git-tin' plugged myself."

"A plausible lie, you rascal; that for it!" and the sport soaped his fingers contemptuously.

"Oh! ye needn't believe me, ef ye don't want-er, but yer kin bet I'm yer friend, frum muzzle ter mud-heel, all ther time. Ye needn't shake—ye kin spit in my face—ye kin tickle me under ther chin wi' a cactus, an' ye kin even offer ter shute me, but I won't git mad—oh! no! I knows ther right sort o' men ter pard wi', when a feller wants ter git ter Congress; an' when I pards wi' any one, I pards wi' solid granite, wi' lode-stone, grit an' gold in it, an' that's you! But looker hyer, Yreka, et seems yer in defickelty ag'in, an' hev lost yer wife. Jest tell us all ther sarcumstances, an' by ther waltz-clog uv old St. Vitus, I'll polish ther seven sides o' every rock west o' the Mississippi, but w'ot I'll find yer red-headed doxy, an' restore her ter yer arms. That's me, an' yer can bet bayonets an' blizzards—"

"I'm Mambrinus Maccaw,
From East Saginaw,
An' the pride o' my life
Aire the size o' me jaw.
I never war blessed
Wi' a mither-in-law;
I gargles me throat,
An' takes me meat raw;
I'm ther he-haw-an'-gee-up
Mambrinus Maccaw!"

And the giant executed an impromptu flip-flap, an' seizing Yreka in a bear-like embrace, proceeded in waltz-movement down the middle of the street.

"Out o' ther way, ye durned dilaperdated galoots!" he roared. "Git off frum ther carpet, for heer comes ther whang-up waltzing-whirligig frum Take-Water! Fiddle up yer music, an' take pards fer a hoe-down. Ther howlin' hydra-headed he-up-an'-haw aire in town, an' thar's blud on ther dial uv ther moon."

Locked in the giant's grasp, Yreka was whirled along for some distance, ere he could extricate himself, the crowd laughing boisterously, for it was really a ludicrous scene.

When he succeeded in freeing himself Yreka, too, was forced to laugh, although he felt provoked at the giant, who was in one of his "playful" moods.

"Confound it! I've a mind to punch your head for you!" Yreka said. "You try any of your funny antics on me again, and you will regret it!"

"Me—me? Why, you mek me larf!" and the giant put his arms akimbo, and gave vent to a guffaw. "Why, Yreka, ye leetle peony, yer wouldn't harm a hair o' my head fur all the gold in Arizona. An' now, my durr Yreka, I want ax a favor o' ye. Ye'r a purty man, wi' eyes like a turtle-dove an' lips like a pair o' roses in July. Wull ye fergive me fer all I've ever did tew yer, an' seal ther compact by imprinting a kiss upon my Grecian forehead? Come, Yreka, an' let ther men o' Red Nose see thet ye hev gall enuff ter face five hundred roarin' cannons, or the furies of an enraged mother-in-law."

"Alas! my courage faileth me at this point!" Yreka said, with a wave of his hand. "When the Joker gets awake, and has his breakfast and a cocktail, I presume you might get up an oscillatory set-to with him!"

And turning upon his heel, Yreka strode toward the hotel.

The bullwhacker was not to be put off, however, but danced forward, locked arms with the sport, and accompanied him.

"Ye can't shake me in thet aire style, me bloomin' rose," he averred. "I hev got ter hev a sinitificut frum you!"

"A certificate!"

"Yas—thet you'll take me fer w'ot I weigh, an' count on me as yer por'us plaster."

The bullwhacker said this in a low tone, and so earnestly, that Yreka gave him an inquiring glance.

"If you want me to believe that you're a friend, say so!"

"That's ther nail! I'll stick ter ye like a burdock burr in a cow's tail an' the cow a light hind-heeler!"

"I am at loss to conceive what advantage it would be to you—being my friend?"

"Mebbe. You don't study grammar, astronomy, dictionary an' common-sense, all at once. I did ye a dirty deal once, an' knowin' yer bed rock, want a show fer doin' ye a good turn!"

"A good turn, eh?"

"You bet yer whole life on that—a turn what will make ye feel so good ye kin jump up an' kick yer socks off. I ain't no prattling porkypine. I've got a brain wot weighs sixteen an' a half ounces ter ev'ry pound, an' I judge I know when I'm lookin' bias or polka dot, 'cept when I've got a gallon of 'aer best bug on board—then, I feel like bevin' a round-to-finish, wi' ther moon. Ther reminds me very forcibly that my nerves hev'n't hed a 'bracer' sence Mary-come-hum. I axed the galoot over at ther shebang ef I ked stan' 'im off fer a 'bite,' an' he laffed, an' allowed ther was a rivulet, a mile b'low here, where they hed free-bar, the year around. Mebbe ye hev'n't a spare drop about yer habiliments, Yreka?"

"Never mind about the 'drop,'" Yreka returned. "Come with me, and I'll sound you!"

This conversation was carried on in an undertone, and the following crowd, who anticipated some more sport, caught but now and then a word of it.

Yreka led the way direct to his room, the door of which he locked, and motioned Maccaw to be seated upon one of the two seats which the place afforded.

A tallow candle burned upon the table, and Joker had taken upon himself to stretch himself out on the primitive bed, instead of resting on the floor, where Yreka had left him.

The animal immediately arose, however, when the two men entered, and eyed Mambrinus Maccaw with a sullen growl.

"See hyer, aire thet anymile dangerous?" the bullwhacker demanded suspiciously, declining to become seated and keeping near the door, for he was not certain but what Yreka had played a revengeful trick upon him.

"Oh, he does not eat any one up at this hour of night unless he is particularly hungry," Yreka replied. "You had better go and kiss him, however, as he might take a mouthful out of you. He is passionately fond of kissing, and makes friends with every one who osculates him."

"Kiss thet b'ar?" Maccaw ejaculated, in disgust. "Silver sand-jigs of old St. Vitus! I'd let 'im eat me up clean, furst. Say, look here; wot did ye fetch me here fer, Yreka?"

The bullwhacker was evidently getting a trifle anxious about his personal safety, for he was afraid of Yreka by great odds more than he was of any other man he had ever encountered.

Yreka laughed oddly.

"Oh, for nothing more than to cut yer heart out and eat it!" he replied. "I believe ye said you were my friend, didn't you?"

"Ev'ry day in a week, an' don't ye drop et, Yreka!"

"And you'd stick by me like a porous plaster?"

"Better'n that, Yreeky—like black ter ther face uv a nigger!"

"You would even live, die, fight and bleed for me?"

"You kin bet yer boots!"

"And about this good turn you propose to do me, providing I take any stock in you? How about that?"

"Why, I'll give ye a p'inter in regard to yer wife."

"Very well. When you are willing to stand a certain test I will believe you."

"What kind of a test?"

"Simple and easy, and yet only one man out of a hundred would perform it through devotion to another. Will you do it?"

"Great mazourky uv old St. Vitus! Don't yer purpose ter tell a feller what it is before-hand?"

And Mambrinus Maccaw began to look decidedly nervous and suspicious, as he saw Yreka's right hand drop to his belt.

"Not a bit of it. If you are a friend of mine, you must take it for granted that whatever I say or do is for the best. Go and place yourself against the wall yonder, facing me!"

"What yer goin' ter do—shute me?"

"No! An apple will have to be shot off your head, before I will believe that you will prove a reliable and efficient pard!"

"Oh! ef that's all, why I ain't skeert—nary a time—no, sir-ee. I'd trust ter yer shutin' Yreka, 'fore any other gerloot I ever see'd, an' don't yer drop it!"

"But, I'm not goin' ter play William Tell," Yreka declared, with a smile.

"You're not?" echoed the giant. "Then, who ther deuce is?"

"My side pardner, Little Joker! You are to put your head against the wall, and I will place an apple upon your head—I happen to have a wild one, with me. I will then put a cocked revolver in the right fore-paw of Joker, as he stands facing you upon his hind feet, and he will split the apple in half, without harming a hair of your head. Do this, and I will be satisfied that I can trust you, and consider you my pard!"

The bullwhacker put up his hands in horror.

"Great oppery minny-musk reels uv ole St. Vitus," he gasped. "Let thet aire animile shute at me—me?"

"Exactly—you!" and Yreka drew a revolver, and cocked it.

"No, I'll be eternally gasted, ef I do!" and Maccaw grew pale with apprehension. "Why, that aire thing don't know how ter shute, no more'n a suckin' goat knows how ter eat hoop-skeerts!"

"Don't you fear; Joker can shoot better than half the humans, who pride themselves on their skill. Come, take your place. I'll guarantee he'll not touch you!"

"Git out! S'posin' he hits me plum in the middle o' ther coackynut—what ther blazes will yer garrenty be gud fer tew me, then? Oh! no—ye don't git this hyer hydraheaded he-up-an'-haw ter be no stool pigeon fer a b'ar—no, sir-ee, bob-tailed burro!"

"Put your back to the wall, and obey, or I will shoot you myself!" Yreka commanded, sternly. "You're in for it, and if you hesitate, you're a dead man!"

There was no doubting the menace in his tones, and, pale and shaky, the bullwhacker backed up against the wall, in the evident belief that his time had come.

Yreka then placed a small wild apple upon his head.

Appearing to realize what was wanted of him, Joker clambered off the bed, reared up on his hind feet, and Yreka placed a cocked six-shooter in the grasp of his right paw!

Then, there was a moment of the most intense silence.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COMPACT.

CHARLES ST. MAUR leaned back in his chair, coolly lit a cigar, and regarded the judge a moment in silence, before beginning the narration, evidently enjoying the old man's discomfort.

"Well, to begin with," he finally said, "there once upon a time dwelt in an Eastern city not a thousand miles from New York a rich old banker, whom we will call Abel Ardmore. Prosperity had smiled upon him all his life, up to the ripe old age of sixty-eight, which period still found him hale and hearty. The Ardmores were the most popular family of the city in which they dwelt, and Abel Ardmore was prominently identified with several railroad corporations. Wealth and popularity, however, did not bring husband and wife the happiness both desired. Although one child was born to them, it was of the female sex, and old Ardmore yearned for a male heir, to hand down his name to posterity.

"But, as years passed by and no son put in an appearance, the banker and his wife concluded to adopt a son, and bring him up as their own. So, they visited the almshouse of a neighboring city, and the result was, they adopted two bright twin boys, whose parents had recently died of small-pox. The boys were but little older than their own daughter, and the trio grew up to man and womanhood, as promising as any parents could wish of their children—handsome and intelligent.

"Agnes Ardmore was one of the most charming of girls, and became a much sought-after belle of society. As she and her adopted brothers grew up, however, they gradually came to regard each other in a different light than as brothers and sister, and it finally became apparent that Ralph and Rolfe were rivals for the hand of Agnes in marriage.

"Of course, she could not favor both, and, as in all cases of the sort—there had to be one favorite brother. This chanced to be Rolfe,

who, though not nearly so stylish and handsome as his brother, was more even-tempered, and possessed of many better traits of character. Ralph, on the other hand, had an ungovernable temper, and was not so well-principled as his brother, and was somewhat inclined to dissipation.

"When the affection of the brothers for their foster-sister became known to Abel Ardmore, he was greatly incensed, and threatened to disinherit his daughter and the successful brother, should the love-affair not be broken up between them. His anger and threats had little effect, however. Rolfe Ardmore was a man with a will of his own, and as he loved Agnes devotedly, and she loved him, he replied that no moneyed prospect should stand between him and a marriage. Accordingly, he and Agnes eloped, were married, and on a very primitive scale started in life for themselves.

"It appeared to be a hard blow to Abel Ardmore and his wife; for the latter died shortly afterward, and the old man did not survive her many months. When his will was read it was found that he had kept good his threat. He had disinherited Rolfe and Agnes, and left everything to the reckless Ralph.

"Not long was the name of Ardmore to remain without a stain of reproach on it—a thing old Abel had made a lifetime's struggle to guard against. Supplied with unlimited means, Ralph Ardmore grew to be one of the wildest rouses in the city. He seemed to have no thought in life further than the gratification of his own desires and the spending of his foster-parent's wealth. True, he succeeded to the presidency of the bank, but his own shortcomings gave his clerks an opportunity to swindle him at every turn, and he finally awoke to the fact that instead of owning the bank, he owed it.

"In the mean time, Rolfe and Agnes struggled through two years of marital experience, in the most frugal and primitive manner; then, when starvation looked not a long way off, Rolfe accepted a loan from his brother, and, dividing it with Agnes, left her and their little boy—a year-old babe—in the East, and came West, in the hope of making his fortune at gold-mining.

"In less than two months after his departure the news reached the East that he had been killed and scalped by Indians. This left Agnes alone and poverty-stricken, at the mercy of the pitiless world. But it also left an opening that Ralph Ardmore was not slow to take advantage of.

"He offered Agnes a place in his home, and a few months later induced her to become his wife. Married life did not agree with him any better, however, nor cause him to mend his ways. A son was born to them, and was but a few months old when Rolfe Ardmore returned East, alive, well, and rich beyond his most sanguine expectations.

"The shock of finding Agnes wedded to Ralph nearly killed him; but, noble man that he was, he never went near them, but turned his face toward the setting sun—a stern, unforgetting, imbibited man.

"A year later his own son and that of Agnes and Ralph were kidnapped from the latter's home, and never recovered, nor were they heard from for years.

"Then, when Ralph Ardmore had been forced to flee from the East for attempting to murder Agnes, the truth finally became known both to him and her. It came in the shape of a letter to each, from Rolfe Ardmore.

"He advised them that he was alive and well—which undoubtedly they had suspected, long before—and that the two boys were the same, but had grown up to manhood strangers to each other; that, when they were men, they should know the story of the past, and that would be his revenge!"

At this point St. Maur took time to help himself to a glass of wine.

"These boys!" Judge Alvin gasped, leaning forward, pale and excited—"their names?"

"Charles and James; but, in the latter instance, originally Edward!"

"Not no!" impatiently, "their last names, I mean!"

"I can enlighten you as to that only about the first-mentioned. He, after his abduction, was reared under the name of Charles St. Maur! But, stop! do not interrupt me, for I am not through yet. Upon attaining my majority, I received a letter from Rolfe Ardmore—a long, explanatory letter, in which he not only opened up the past as I have mentioned, but often referred to his own life, wild, remorseful, merciless in the extreme. He said some day there

would be a time of reckoning, and it was by a letter from him that I was advised to come to Red Nose as a temperance lecturer. Jeremiah Alvin, you are really the Ralph Ardmore of the past!"

The bonanza king of Red Nose bowed mechanically.

"I am!" he said, huskily. "And you—are you his son, or mine?"

"I will not lie to you—I do not know. He has never given me so much as a hint toward letting me know who I am. I suppose the other one has been kept in the same obscurity—at least I judge so. But I will tell you this much—I believe that I am your son!"

"Why?"

"Because you are of a villainous disposition and I am not unlike you. Then, again—read this!"

He threw an enveloped letter upon the table, and the judge snatched it up eagerly.

It was without date or heading, and ran as follows:

"CHAS. ST. MAUR:—Go to Red Nose as a temperance lecturer. There you will meet a person you will become interested in. If your interest does not absorb your prudence, work him for all he is worth. The end is not far off. ROLFE ARDMORE."

Judge Alvin's face assumed a color between livid and pallor.

"Curse him!" he gasped. "He is still alive then, and means me no good!"

"You are guessing pretty fairly," St. Maur declared. "He means business!"

"Where is he?"

"From remarks uttered by Yreka Jim, to-night, I infer that he is not far away."

"Hal! Curse him! Explain!"

The judge was growing excited and vengeful. He seemed to feel power, money and popularity moving from beneath him.

"Don't get impatient. The world was not made in one day. How is your stock of wine hanging fire? This last bottle has played out!"

With a grunt, the judge arose, unsteadily crossed the floor to the closet, and returned with the wine.

A glass apiece was partaken of, and then St. Maur went on:

"Well, you will remember that Yreka Jim and I had a confab, the result of which was, I had to give up a deed and mortgage?"

"Yes."

"Well, some time since Yreka Jim bought the ranch in Vista Valley of a man named Vox Van Gelder, dog cheap, and paid cash down for it, all except \$5,000. This sum was put on mortgage, the time expiring, grace and all, at ten o'clock, the day following Yreka Jim's arrest, here in Red Nose. Knowing the circumstances, and that Yreka was short, and had come here to make a raise, I was on hand, the next day, and took up the mortgage, which had been given by Yreka Jim and wife. Owing to our remarkable resemblance, Vox Van Gelder did not recognize me from the real Yreka."

"Ah! Go on!"

"It was my intention to secure the death of the real Yreka and put my feet in his shoes, but, as you know, he wasn't here, on my return, and the plot failed, for the time being. Now, as we proceed, let me tell you that, from the time of getting Rolfe Ardmore's explanatory letter, several years ago, I have not been idle. I have exerted all my ingenuity to find out where he kept himself, and have at last nailed my man. Rolfe Ardmore, and Vox Van Gelder are identical."

"If so, and he knows you—which he must do, if he is constantly aware of your whereabouts, why did he not recognize you, then?"

"That I do not know, unless it was because of the existing resemblance between myself and Yreka Jim."

"And, from what you say, Yreka Jim is, in your imagination, the other of the two boys who were stolen by Rolfe Ardmore?"

"That is my belief!"

The judge was silent a moment biting his lips with vexation.

"It's a strange affair," he finally declared, "and I cannot make out clearly what is going to transpire. If Yreka Jim is the other boy, do you think he knows that Rolfe Ardmore and Vox Van Gelder are one and the same person?"

"No. I'll bet on it that he is ignorant of the fact. Van Gelder, in dealing with him, about the ranch, showed him no more mercy than he would a perfect stranger—hardly as much, I fancy. He's not a merciful man, say the best you can of him!"

"Then, Yreka's presence, here, has no significance attached to it, in regard to the business pertaining to Van Gelder's maneuvers?"

"Probably not. Yreka, if he is the man, very likely received the same sort of an explanatory letter I did, and may have ferreted out more than he lets on. Indeed, his evident aversion to you and me, seems to argue that he is not ignorant. It is my belief that Van Gelder means to make one of the two of us—Yreka or I—or maybe, the both of us, the instrument through which he will obtain revenge on you!"

"Curse him! what shall I do?"

"Leave it to me. Put your whole confidence in me, and we will work together. Be I your son or not, I will fight for you, on one condition!"

"And that—"

"—Is that you will make me your heir!"

Judge Alvin reached his hand across the table, his eyes gleaming.

"It's a bargain!" he said, grimly. "You stick by me, and you shall be my heir—my son!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A WONDERFUL SHOT.

It was the sealing of a compact, and a glass of wine was tossed off, in honor of the occasion.

"Now, then," Judge Alvin said, "as you say you have devoted some time to ferreting out matters, can you tell me what became of Agnes—where she is, and whether living or dead?"

"I can tell you only this much," St. Maur said. "After you deserted her, and she learned that her first husband was living, she swore that she would tirelessly follow your trail, and bide her time until an opportunity presented itself to ruin you beyond retrieve—financially, and otherwise. She, then, disappeared, to be seen no more. Rolfe Ardmore also alludes to her as seeking vengeance, in the letter he wrote me, several years ago. So, dad, you're between two fires, that has got plenty fuel to keep them burning. You don't know what minute you'll be taken off, and neither do I—for, mind you, I've got a petticoater hunting after me!"

"How is that?"

"Oh! I got mixed up in a little intrigue with a girl, named Faith Hemple, over in Colorado—sham marriage, you know—and when I left her for greener fields and pastures new, she got upon her ear and swore blood-an'-butcher-knives she'd hunt me down to death. At last accounts, she was still hunting me, and I've an intuition it won't be a century before I hear from her again. You heard Yreka speak about his wife being missing? Well, I left one of Faith's letters in Yreka's coat, while I was at the ranch, and I reckon she got onto it; anyhow, it drove her out of her mind, and she vamoosed, and was found wandering through the mountains, near here!"

"Ha! by whom?"

"By myself. I captured her, and now hold her a captive."

"You do? What is your object?"

"I mean to make her the instrument of my revenge upon Yreka Jim, if I do not succeed in killing him."

Judge Alvin made a gesture of impatience.

"You would not commit murder?" he said.

"Ha! I'd do anything. Yreka will kill me if he sees me in Red Nose again, and, if I mistake not, Rolfe Ardmore would favor such a crime. After my death, you, too, would die, and Yreka would be pushed forward as your heir."

"Ha! by whom?"

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"Perhaps! But, murder happens to be a serious crime."

"Bah! It's getting to be a common amusement nowadays. To-morrow is election, and if I can prevent it, Yreka Jim will not waken to take any interest in that event."

He spoke fiercely—venomously.

Judge Alvin, however, shook his head, evidently not favoring the idea.

"It's dangerous?" he protested. "If Yreka Jim was to be found murdered, the crime would be blamed upon you, if, indeed, I were not implicated in it. No! no! it won't do!"

"Then, do you want the rascal elected Mayor of Red Nose to-morrow? Do you want to lose all your power—perhaps all of your money?"

"No. But I have an idea which even your ingenuity has not developed. This wife of Yreka's—is she really insane?"

"Yes."

"Where is she?"

"Shut up in a cave, not half a dozen miles from here."

"She will be safe there until wanted?"

"Perfectly. Not a soul but myself knows where she is."

"Then, listen. Let things take their own course. If Red Nose goes for Yreka to-morrow let her go. When election is over I will even

then rule this town, and Yreka shall give me the right to do so!"

Then ensued a long conference between the two villains, the particulars of which will transpire later.

Suffice to say the interview did not end until a few minutes before Yreka Jim's return to the vicinity of the Buckin' Cayuse, prior to his street encounter with Mambrinus Maccaw.

And also that at least three distinct persons overheard the substance of all that passed between the judge and St. Maur, neither one of the trio being aware but what they were the only eavesdroppers!

When St. Maur left the Alvin residence it was in a disguise furnished him by the judge, in which he fancied his identity was secure from discovery.

And let us now return to the room in the Buckin' Cayuse, where we left Yreka Jim, Maccaw and Joker, the principals of a novel and original tableau.

The bullwhacker stood with his back against the wall, trembling as in an ague-fit, while Joker stood with the revolver outstretching the grasp of his right fore-paw.

"One! two! three!" Yreka counted slowly and in a measured tone, as if giving the word to a twain of duelists—"fire!"

The next instant there was the report of the weapon, and a yell from Maccaw as he tumbled forward upon the floor and rolled and kicked as if in mortal agony.

"Oh! Lordy! oh, Lordy!" he roared. "I'm shot—I'm salivated, jes' as I told ye. Ouch! hurry an' git a doctor—oh! o-o-o!"

"Get up, you lying fool!" Yreka commanded, sternly. "You were not hit at all, but Joker busted the apple like a little major."

"The devil you say!" and Maccaw felt of his head and found fragments of the apple spattered over it. "Grat silver-sand jigs of old St. Vitus! I thort et war me brains w'ot war scatterin' around so permiscu's. An' so that aire b'ar actooally slugged ther apple, eh?" and the giant gazed in unalloyed astonishment at the wonderful animal, who, reared upon its hind-feet, still clutched the weapon.

"Yes, Joker did that same!" Yreka asserted, proudly; "and what is more, can do it again. But now that you have stood the test, there is no reason for me to longer doubt your loyalty unless I detect you in playing me false. Then, I'll shoot you down as I would a wolf."

"Yer needn't hev no fear, Yreka. Yer will find me solid frum muzzle ter mud-heel, an' by ther pedestal clog of old St. Vitus, when I say er thing et aire as dependable as ther Rock uv Ages."

"Time alone will prove that. As for the present tell me what you know concerning my wife?"

"Yer bet I will. Yer wife aire crazy 'bout some letter she found in yer duds, w'ot was left there by St. Maur."

"I am so aware. But go on."

"She quit ther ranch and went wanderin' thru' the mount'ings in search ov some place ter lay down an' die. Ther aire snoozer, St. Maur, he got onter her trail and overtook and captured her, an' shut her up in a mountain cave!"

"I am also aware of that, sir. But that point is not of much particular importance to me. What I want to know is, where is she confined? Do you know?"

"Great gyartin' geesers, yes. I reckon I orter, when he caged her in ther werry same place whar I've bin restin' my shins, nocturnally, sence I've bin sojournin' in this vicinity."

"Does St. Maur know this?"

"Nary!"

"And you are sure that Martha will be all safe and unharmed where she is, until I want her?"

"As snug as a bug in a rug!"

"Then, let her remain there. I have learned that to-night, which convinces me that the machination of two precious rascals is liable to get nipped in the bud."

The bullwhacker pricked up his ears.

"Say, lookes hyer: I'll bet ther buttons off old Neptune's vest that you war eavesdroppin' a bit ago; now warn't ye?"

"Eavesdropping? Where?"

"Up at the judge's!"

"And were you?"

"Bet yer boots! Heerd ther hull interview 'twixt St. Maur an' the judge."

"And so did I," Yreka replied, putting forth his hand. "We'll shake flippers on that."

"You bet we will, Yreka, ye old he-up-an'-haw, an' I'm a hydra-headed, howlin' hi-aglo,

ef we ain't got ther steer by ther horns, fer onc't."

"I think so. After election is over, we will see. Now I'll excuse you for to-night, as I have some writing to do. To-morrow—providing I do not get murdered in my bed to-night, by St. Maur—we will see what we can do for election."

"Oh! yer kin bet I'll keep a eye onter ther skunk, so thet he don't trouble yer sleep," Maccaw assured, "an' I'll bet a boot-leg thet aire b'ar kin lick a dozen of him. As fer myself—

"I'm Mambrinus Maccaw,
From East Saginaw,
An' ther pride o' my life,
Aire ther size o' me jaw.
I live on gunpowder,
An' El Paso cold slaw,
An' I'm bevel-edged death
On a mother-in-law!"

Then the giant grotesquely bowed himself out of Yreka Jim's presence.

CHAPTER XIV.

ELECTION.

THE next day dawned bright and auspicious, the sun shone warmly on the mountain-peaks, and the air, which swept down the gulch through Red Nose town, was pine-scented and refreshing.

The populace was early astir and in a feverish state of excitement, for to-day was to decide who was to hold future sway in the camp as its ruler—or its "mayor," as the people chose to designate the office.

It was as yet but a matter of conjecture who would be the successful candidate—Yreka Jim or Judge Alvin.

Both men had their backers, and the struggle for victory promised to be a spirited one.

The judge was abroad bright and early, and made it a point to button-hole every man he met.

"You're all right for protection to our mutual interests, of course," he would assert, with a great amount of confidence. "It would be rash in the extreme for you to give your vote to a person who has no monetary influence or power to give you employment. Who pays your wages? I do. Who owns the controlling interest in the camp, and furnishes you laborers with work and money? I do, of course. Can Yreka Jim do this? Certainly not. He has not a cent invested in the town, and if you go back on me, who is to furnish you employment?"

It was a strong argument, and naturally had its effect upon those who were dependent upon their day's wages for their livelihood.

And as to such as acted at all "cflish," the judge made no hesitation whatever in slipping a ten or five-dollar note into their hands, so that it seemed pretty evident that he would be the successful man at the polls.

Yreka Jim arose late, and his appearance on the street was the signal for an outburst of enthusiasm which found vent in hearty applause.

"Hyer he comes, feller-pilgrims!" roared the stentorian voice of Mambrinus Maccaw, waving his battered hat high above his head—"hyer comes ther rose-geranium frum ther realms o' honesty! Hyer comes ther new Mayor ov Red Nose, an' ev'ry mother's son as don't vote fer him orter be rid on a bevel-edged midsummer's-night's-dream frum heer ter Hamville. Three yells an' a yoop fer Yreka Jim!"

The cheers were heartily given, and those who proposed to cast their vote for the sport gathered around him and shook him by the hand.

The polls were kept by Jake Taylor, of the Buckin' Cayuse, whom every one allowed could be depended upon to do the square thing.

As the day progressed the excitement grew more intense.

Bets were openly offered, ten to seven, that Judge Alvin would win, but found few takers, until after mid-day, when the larger share of the camp's votes had been polled; then, to the astonishment of everybody, Mambrinus Maccaw loomed up as a sporting individual.

On top of an up-ended kerosene barrel, in the middle of the street, did the bullwhacker take his stand, and by wild hoots and gesticulations succeeded in drawing a crowd around.

"Hyer I am, ye gaupin' galoots, the great nickle-plated hydra-headed howlin' be-up-an' haw from Hadesville—the sportin' snappin'-turtle, w'ot stands ready ter snap up yer bets faster'n a mother-in-law's jaw kin work. Bet? Bet? Why, great silver sand-jigs uv old St. Vitus! I'm ready ter offer any man odds o'

fifteen ter ten thet Yreka Jim carries ther town!"

"We are taking all that kind of bets," Judge Alvin cried, stepping up with a fistful of bank-bills. "What is your limit, big mouth?"

"Hey! what's that ye say? Big mouth? Holy shakes uv old St. Vitus! jest yer wait, old big corpus, till I get thr'u' bettin', an' I'll jest erbout climb down thar an' punch brands o' claret out o' you. Big mouth, eh? Oh! b'illin' bufflers! jest wait till yer git hit by a bevel-edged back-hander from yer unctious uncle! Walk up, pilgrims—fifteen ter ten, an' ther bank wide open, that Yreky Jimmy smuggles ther sock at this hyer election by a large majority!"

"If you want to bet, I stand ready to bet you any sum from five hundred to five thousand!" the judge shouted excitedly. "How much money have you got that you are making so much fuss over it?"

"Just perzactly seventeen cents!" Mambrinus declared, with a grin, exhibiting a lot of pennies in the palm of his hand.

Judge Alvin would have turned away, in disgust, but the bullwhacker did not give him time. He dived down into either coat-pocket, and therefrom drew two huge rolls of greenbacks, encircled by rubber bands.

"Hol' hol' Thort ye caught ther great be-up-an'-haw a-napping, didn't yer?" the giant roared. "But sech ain't ther case. I'm ther hypothecated ha'r-pin w'ots sp'illin' ter bet yer any amount ye want—don't keer a decimal darn what ther figgers am. I'm a snorter, a sneezer, an a snuff-taker, an' my favorite dish aire pud-din'. So, I'd jest as lief tackle yer crust as not!"

"I'll bet you five thousand!" the judge roared, enraged to see that others had money afloat, besides himself.

"Go yer five, an' raise yer five better," Maccaw yelled, executing a jig upon the barrel-head. "Bet you ten thousan' ter five, twenty ter ten, a hundred ter fifty, ef ye like, thet Yreka gathers in ther electoral garter, this election!"

"And I will bet a hundred thousand, even, the same way!" a cool voice cried, and a man stepped forward, whom Yreka Jim, who was an interested listener and spectator, recognized as Vox Van Gelder.

Judge Alvin glared at the new-comer, a moment, fiercely, receiving a like look in return; then, with a muttered curse, he dived down into various pockets, and hauled out roll after roll of greenbacks.

One thing was evident; he had not come out upon the street of Red Nose with the idea of being bluffed on account of money matters.

"I will take both bets!" he cried, with an oath. "Here is a gold eagle—head or tails, for choice of stakeholder!"

"Tails!" Van Gelder cried, as the judge sent the coin spinning into the air.

After rising upward about ten feet, the coin fell upon the hard-pan street with a sharp ring.

"Tails wins choice!" a dozen voices cried, as many heads were craned forward.

"Then I appoint Yreka Jim stakeholder," Van Gelder answered.

"And I second ther motion—by ther great high horned humper from Hidaglo!" assented Maccaw.

It was not for Judge Alvin to object, although his rage was fearful. He had made the proposition, and must abide by the result, or run the risk of incurring the disrespect of many of those whom he depended upon to help him into the mayoralty chair.

Accordingly, he deposited one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in Yreka Jim's hands, while Van Gelder and Maccaw each surrendered their stakes of one hundred.

"Gentlemen!" Yreka said, when he had received the money, a smile playing over his face, "each man whose money I hold had better keep a watchful eye on me, or I may skip with this cash!"

"I've no fear of that!" Van Gelder said, "there's not that sort of stock in you!"

"Yess, an' I'm not frettin' ther fringe off my face!" Maccaw declared.

Yreka sauntered over to the hotel, took a seat there, and spent the balance of the afternoon in chatting and smoking.

Not but what he was every minute on the alert, for he surmised that an assault might be made upon him, at any minute, by Alvin's party, for possession of the immense sum in his keeping.

About an hour before the closing of the polls, when there were yet somewhere near forty votes to be cast. Mambrinus Maccaw, after a

temporary absence made his reappearance on the street near the Buckin' Cayuse.

His unsteady walk plainly indicated that he had been gorging himself with drink.

Not only this, but in his arms and pockets, together, he brought with him over a dozen bottles of wine—the rich old Burgundy, which Judge Alvin had secretly, from time to time, supplied his private closet with.

He had, in truth, had a "skeleton in his closet," but it had made its escape, now, and Mambrinus Maccaw was escorting it up the street, with the dignity of the leader of a centennial parade.

The sight was one that to some extent electrified the people of Red Nose; at any rate it created a wide-spread sensation.

As he advanced, Maccaw waved one bottle in triumph above his head, and gave vent to yell after yell, of the most ear-splitting character.

"Hyer I come," he shouted, "ther great hydra-headed be-up-an'-gee-haw, from Take-'em-in-out-o' the Wet—ther bevel-edged midsummer night's dream, from Monkey Mountings. Hyer I come, thet bibulous bi-Centennial celebration o' ther electshun uv old Bacchus, in Red Nose!"

When he reached the as yet undisturbed barrel, from which he had made his wager with Judge Alvin, he proceeded to place the bottles thereon.

"Come up, ye thet hev not voted, an' aire-thirsty, thru hev'n' bin torked tew death, fer ther great be-up-an'-haw aire 'tendin' bar to-day, an' before ary man o' you teches a smelk o' this invigorator, I hev ter ye a tail tew unfold!"

The invitation was not unheeded, and in short order, a goodly congregation surrounded the bullwhacker.

"Now, ladies an' gentlemen, not barrin' ther tender sex out, ef thar's any present," Maccaw began, "I am heer ter let yer onter suthin' ov importance. Every minnit I expand my lungs, in makin' this matter known ter ye, I expect ter git salivated. Ef I do, wull yer as a people, avenge me?"

"We will!" came a hoarse shout from the assemblage, who had more of an eye to the row of bottles upon the barrel-top than to the giant's speech.

"On course you will!" Mambrinus declared, juggling a bottle from thumb to finger. "An' ef ye don't, thar's a man in this burg who will—that's Yreka Jim. An' now, all o' yer keep an eye screwed onter Jedge Alvin, an' I'll open battery. Last night I played spy onter ther judge, jest ter satisfy meself ther sort of a hairpin he was. Now, from what 'pears ter be ther wrangle in this hyer town o' Red Nose, ther jedge hev bin lettin' on he wouldn't tech a drop of intoxicatin' likker, ef yer wor ter give him forty milyun shekels o' gold."

A murmur of assent arose—a murmur that was somewhat ominous in its meaning, and caused Maccaw to gaze sharply around.

"Yas, the judge let on he wouldn't give a cent fer all ther whisk in all Christendom, an' wanted ter keep yer noses all away from ther bung-hole, while he hed his lips glued ter a nozzle. An', boyees, thet's ther kind cv a ha'r-pin who wants ter be Mayor o' Red Nose! These hyer bottles o' wine I found in his house, an' last night I see'd him an' St. Maur suckin' ther bibulous from ther same sort o' bottles. An' now, who orter rule Red Nose?"

For an instant after the conclusion of the giant's address, there was a silence so interse that a pin's drop might have been heard; then, as of one accord, there arose a shout, strong and hearty, uttering the name

"YREKA JIM!"

A rush was made for the veranda of the hotel, where the sport was seated, watching the scene. In spite of his attempt to ward them off he was seized, raised upon their hands, and borne aloft over the heads of the crowd.

Revolvers glistened here and there, also, and more than one voice uttered the inquiries:

"Where's Alvin?" "Whar's the judge?"

But seeing the exposure that the giant had turned upon him, the judge had wisely vanished, and St. Maur, even though disguised, had not followed far behind him.

And when it became evident the local element was strongly against Alvin, not counting his previous opponents, a party was organized, and sent in search of him.

But his dwelling was unoccupied, and no trace whatever could be found of him.

He had, as he supposed, done the wise thing, and lost no time in getting out of Red Nose.

After the exposure, and the comment over

Judge Alvin's flight was over, the remaining election votes were quickly cast and Yreka Jim got every one of them.

The count was then inaugurated and bonfires were prepared for lighting.

When the count was finished the announcement was given forth before witnesses of the count, that the future Mayor of Red Nose was Yreka Jim by a majority of 27.

Then for two straight hours Red Nose became hideous with shouts of acclamation, every man seemingly rejoicing at the victory since Mambrinus Maccaw's exposure of the bogus temperance candidate.

As for Yreka, he underwent the handshaking and congratulation until he was fatigued and then took advantage of an opportunity to seek his room, first delivering to Vox Van Gelder and Maccaw the wager-money they were entitled to.

The victory was won and part of the sport's compact, with the robber Queen was fulfilled.

CHAPTER XV.

ONLY A DREAM AFTER ALL.

In stealing away from Red Nose, Alvin and St. Maur had gone alone, but together.

First they had met at the judge's house and compared notes, and arriving at the conclusion that it was no longer healthy for them to linger in town openly, Alvin had taken all his available wealth, and the twain had hurried out of the place.

Their destination, St. Maur shaping the course, was the cave where Martha, Yreka's wife, was confined.

"That will afford us a safe place of refuge for the present," the temperance apostle had assured, "and will give us an opportunity to steal back and get revenge."

Their flight was not detected in time to intercept them and they reached the cave in due time.

To their chagrin, however, they found that Martha was no longer there, unmistakable evidences indicating that she had but recently been rescued.

After deliberation the two villains, realizing that revenge was the only thing they need expect to get in Red Nose, left the cave and took the back trail.

"May all the furies seize them!" the judge hissed in his intense rage. "I seemed to feel this defeat impending the first time I ever saw Yreka Jim, and on him I lay the blame. He shall die before I turn away from Red Nose again."

"You are right," St. Maur hissed, "but not less him than Vox Van Gelder, and not less than you, Ralph Ardmore. Be you my father or not, your money is of the most value!"

A glittering knife in his grasp, would have been buried in the elder villain's breast, but for a terrific blow which laid St. Maur senseless at the feet of the man he would have murdered, while, at the same time, the judge was borne backward to the ground, and bound securely, hand and foot.

The forms of the two men were then raised and borne rapidly away.

Yreka Jim, on reaching his room, threw himself upon the bed, and it required no special effort, on his part, for him to fall asleep.

Being considerably fatigued owing to the excitement of the day, he slept for several hours.

When he awoke, the scene was so entirely changed, that for many minutes he was unable to make himself believe but what he was dreaming.

Then, however, the sight of Mambrinus Maccaw, and the unmistakable sound of his voice, gave him more assurance that what he saw, was real.

He was back in the cellar again, where he had been taken, after being released from jail!

He was seated upon a stool, his back leaning against one wall of the room. His feet were fastened with leathern straps, and his arms glued behind his back.

Near him, sat Vox Van Gelder, in a similar plight, while, opposite him, at the other side of the room, Judge Alvin and St. Maur were seated, also bound.

At the table were two women, and Mambrinus Maccaw.

One of the females, who was richly attired, and wore diamonds, was an elderly, but handsome lady, who, in her young years, must have been possessed of rare beauty.

The other woman was evidently not yet of age, and very pretty.

The faces of the two women, however, were stern and pitiless, in expression, and Yreka

wondered not a little what new tragedy was to be enacted, for a deathlike feeling seemed to pervade the place.

It was Maccaw's words that first caused the new "mayor" to realize his situation:

"Thar, Yreka's awake. Now, then, hurry through with this business."

Whereupon the elder woman turned to Yreka Jim:

"You are Yreka Jim?"

"Yes, madam."

"Elected Mayor of Red Nose?"

"So it was decided."

"Do you remember of having been here before?"

Yreka nodded.

"Do you know how you got here now?"

"Not a remember."

"You were drugged and brought here. Do you recognize the man beside you?"

"Of course I do; it is Vox Van Gelder."

"Do you know that he once had another name?"

"I have heard so."

"What name?"

"Rolfe Ardmore."

"Correct. The man yonder, who has been known as Alvin, is Ralph Ardmore. I was wedded to both of these men, and am a mother to you and to St. Maur, there. Which man do you take to be your father?"

Yreka nodded his head toward Van Gelder. "Is he right?" the robber Queen demanded of Van Gelder.

The man made no verbal answer, but bowed assent.

The Queen then turned to Yreka.

"You hear? Your birthright has at last been established. We simply request you to witness one more act, and then Mr. Maccaw, who dissolves partnership with us to-night, will conduct you direct to Vista Villa, where your wife is recovering in a doctor's charge."

At a motion from the Queen, the younger woman drew a revolver and approached St. Maur.

"It is needless to say that you know me," she said, cocking the weapon. "You deceived me with a sham marriage. My day of revenge has arrived!"

He uttered a cry of alarm; she heeded it not, for she deliberately raised the weapon and shot him through the heart.

The robber Queen then arose, leveled a pistol at Judge Alvin, and fired.

The sun was shining brightly down into Vista Valley, and rested warmly upon a pretty hacienda, set down among a yard of flowers.

Not far distant cattle were grazing peacefully, and herders were riding in, to the mid-day toot of a bugle.

"Yreka! Yreka! you lazy, good-for-nothing fellow!" cried a pretty little red-haired woman, coming out of the house and shaking a handsome, long-haired fellow, who was sleeping upon the veranda.

"Come, wake up! You have been sleeping here all the forenoon, and you know Mr. Van Gelder comes for the balance on the mortgage to-day. Come, now; dinner is all ready!"

The sleeper arose with a yawn, and passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

"Martha," he said, passing his arm around his wife's waist, "I have been dreaming. Oh, such a wonderful dream it was, starting from Eagle's Cliff, up yonder! I believe it is a bad omen to our future happiness. Sit down, and I will tell you all about it."

And he did.

But why should we repeat it? It was a dream, and has been told.

And did it mean an omen of evil to the happiness of those two loving hearts?

Let us hope not.

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